

# Farmers take bold approach to sales

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IN A bid to gain more control of their future, farmers on Eyre Peninsula want greater involvement in the marketing of their products.

The farmers have established a grower-owned company called FREE Eyre, which in turn has created EP Grain, a joint venture with commodity management company Emerald Group Australia. EP Grain will co-operatively market grain.

FREE Eyre aims to issue a prospectus next week to attract investors and capital to back the joint venture as well as other business incubator activities.

Other business opportunities under consideration include grain storage, value-adding lamb and agro-forestry plantations.

FREE Eyre has 247 farmer members so far - about 25 per cent of the region's farms - and expects to handle a significant amount of grain this year.

Managing director Susi Tegen said the end of the single desk for wheat exports had been a major catalyst for FREE Eyre.

"It is no different to why Bendigo Bank started community banks at places such as Cummins," she said.

"What FREE Eyre has been able to do with EP Grain is allow another player in the market and provide real choice in the deregulated market."

Ms Tegen said an aim of FREE Eyre was to help develop the

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region and it had received great assistance from the Eyre Regional Development Board.

"One of the hardest things with farmers is to mobilise change," she said.

"But after five hard years with poor weather and low prices, the EP farmers have pulled together to do something.

"This is allowing us to do many things, the main one is providing options with regard to marketing grain and developing other business ventures which will benefit the Eyre Peninsula.

"They are expected to include prime lamb finishing, growing oil mallee trees and the possibilities of producing wood pellets and carbon trading.

"In the past the farmers felt like they had lost control, now they want to take some ownership back."

FREE Eyre is holding a series of meetings across Eyre Peninsula this week to provide more information about EP Grain.

The joint venture between EP Grain and Emerald involves FREE Eyre providing 50 per cent of the equity.

Ms Tegen said Emerald brought many benefits including industry expertise, particularly in marketing, a very good risk-management history and experience in working with other farm groups around Australia such as SQP Ballarat.