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Farmers setting out to value-add on their terms

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PRODUCING biodiesel, noodles and pasta, boutique beer, branded meat products and a range of stockfeeds are just a few of the ambitious projects being examined by Eyre Peninsula farmers.

After being at the mercy of world markets for decades, these farmers have had enough.

The region - as large as Tasmania - supplies 30-40 per cent of South Australia's grain and wants a fairer end-price share.

In an attempt to take its future into its own hands, the region's farmers have developed Free Eyre with the aim of putting more money into their pockets.

Instigated by Liz Pearson and a group of Kimba farmers late last year, the group raised more than \$780,000 in the midst of a bad drought and during harvest to develop a strategic plan.

Since then Free Eyre, chaired by Kimba farmer David Jericho, has been developing a base plan with the aim of setting up a company to pursue the best options.

Mr Jericho said it stemmed from a widespread belief there was a need to gain more value for Eyre Peninsula's products.

"We produce 30-40 per cent of the state's grain each year but we have very little value-adding here," Mr Jericho said.

"All of us would like to enter the value-adding chain but it is often seen as too hard. Together, we have a much better chance of achieving that aim."

He said areas being investigated include grain-based foods, intensive livestock industries, specialised aquaculture, livestock feeds and grain accumulation.

"We have the largest fishing fleet in the southern hemisphere and the largest aquaculture industry in

Australia," he said.

"If we can pull together some of those, we can shake the tree."

Mr Jericho said the committee was working this month towards developing a corporate identity and searching for suitable directors. "The advice we are taking is that it is more likely to be an unlisted public company than a co-operative," he said.

Mr Jericho said a capital raising would follow, but its exact nature was uncertain,

"This group wants to be market focused rather than production focused because one of the problems is we tend to be production focused," he said.

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