

Strength in numbers

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Farmers in Southern NSW have stepped in to wrest greater control of their industry. They want a local face for their production and marketing ventures with returns coming back into local communities.

Steering Committee members Andrew Bouffler, Brent Alexander, Richard Carn and

David Goode, firmly believe the formation of Southern Agventure will achieve this goal. Bonuses along the way will be greater employment opportunities and keeping young people in the area.

Since the deregulation of grain marketing and the loss of the single desk, the group identified the need for a local face to be found in the marketing of grain instead of accessing information on the internet and from metropolitan sources.

They see the loss of the single desk and the setting up of Southern Agventure as timely. Frustrated growers have big concerns about how they will market grain for export in a good season.

Friday's meeting with Mike Chaseling, director of the Emerald Australia Group, was a culmination of 12 months work for the steering committee.

Emerald's joint ventures had a busy year handling 5 percent of the nation's wheat crop and 1.5 million tonnes of grain. Accredited by Wheat Exports Australia (WEA), the company which started in 2004 had an annual turnover of \$350 million. Its contacts with alliances and joint ventures such as Free Eyre Ltd, could be the steering committee's answer.

Free Eyre services the very specific needs of the Eyre Peninsula farmers and EP Grains Pty Ltd is the joint venture partnership with Emerald that offers a full range of grain marketing solutions for wheat, barley and canola farmers there.

"We have an image philosophy for grain marketing that supports the point of view, that growers are our customers," Mr Chaseling said.

Steering committee president Andrew Bouffler is excited and optimistic about the direction they are taking.

"Farmers are idea rich but time poor," he explained.

"It's about looking for opportunities and employing experts to deliver at the local level where there has been a build up of trust," he said.

The group plans to embrace a wide horizon. "We want to be as relevant to the cattleman at Holbrook as we are to the sheep farmer at Boree Creek and grain growers throughout the southern region," Brent Alexander said.

The Steering committee identify with Free Eyre which is looking at a major lamb branding project with big numbers of sheep and the production of mallee oil.

Southern Agventure is a spin-off from the group of farmers that investigated prospects of producing ethanol and bio-diesel from grain and waste products using seed capital contributed by local farming communities.

Despite the long dry spell, Southern Agventure needs fire power to be up and running and will start raising capital in the next few months.

"A series of meetings will be held throughout southern NSW in July to tell farmers about the concept and gain their pledge of support," Mr Bouffler said.

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