

The Hon. David Littleproud MP
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

4 April 2022

Re: Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) for smallholders and primary producers

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you on behalf the Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance (AFSA); a collective of smallholders and other independent producers; and our allies across Australia, who urge the Federal Government to remove institutional barriers to financial assistance under the current Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA), which assists states in allocating relief funding to farmers during crises.

Following recent flooding in Queensland and New South Wales, farmers must now recover from devastating loss of produce, livestock, and infrastructure, to rebuild and continue feeding local communities. Many of the small-scale farmers in our network have sought financial assistance under the Federal Government's DRFA, only to have their claim rejected during state government processing as they do not meet the Government's definition of a primary producer.

As farmers who work around the clock, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, this was news to us. As such, we gathered responses from our network, to try and understand who does, and does not, meet the definition of primary producer under the Federal Government. We have heard from a number of small and medium-scale producers who have had claims for relief funding from bushfires, droughts and other disasters rejected under the DRFA. Being employed in off-farm activities has been cited as a key reason for rejection under the DRFA. Considering that on average, [Australian farmers attribute 14 per cent of their total annual income to off-farm employment](#), such reasoning is an oversight from the policymakers responsible for setting the rules under the DRFA.

This failure from Government has led us to probe the current stipulations outlined in the DRFA regarding eligibility for farmers seeking financial assistance in disaster recovery. We conclude that the Government's understanding of farming outside of the dominant, industrial model is inaccurate, unfair, and dismissive in capturing the important role of smallholders and other independent primary producers in Australian agriculture.

Although we operate outside of big agribusiness in Australia, smallholders must be recognised as primary producers by all levels of government - in fact our rights are enshrined in the [United](#)

[Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas \(UNDROP\).](#)

In times of increasing challenges to food security, we argue that smallholders are the most stable, consistent primary producers in Australia, ensuring local communities continue to have access to affordable, healthy and diverse food sources. Supply chain disruption throughout the COVID-19 pandemic has left supermarket shelves bare, and vulnerable people in search of staple food items. Heavy rainfall and flooding as a result of La Niña and climate change have destroyed crops and yields, leading to more food scarcity on the same shelves. Global trade sanctions imposed on Russia following its invasion of Ukraine have triggered an increase to food prices, again to the detriment of vulnerable populations. In spite of these challenges, it has been smallholders who have been able to effectively provide local communities with access to affordable, high-quality produce.

We welcome communities onto our farms to purchase what they need, we show up to farmer's markets every Sunday with fresh, seasonal produce, and we drop off deliveries direct from farm to plate, building connections to community in the process, nowhere more than through the growth of [community-supported agriculture \(CSA\)](#). **And so we ask you: Why does the Federal Government insist on ignoring so many people responsible for feeding local communities culturally-appropriate and nutritious food grown in ethical and ecologically-sound ways?**

We urge you, as the Federal Minister for Agriculture, to advocate for our right to be recognised as such under the DRFA, and provide us with adequate and appropriate disaster relief funding. Just as we show up for communities in times of crisis, we ask that Government shows up for us when we need it most. The Federal Government can do this by:

- Reconsidering its definition of primary producers as outlined in the DRFA to ensure it includes smallholders and other independent producers;
- Work with state governments to ensure this definition is uniformly applied across state and territory jurisdictions;
- Reassess or prioritise appeals for rejected claims from smallholders and other producers under a revised definition of primary producers

We believe such actions are a reasonable response to Government failure and will ensure a fair, accurate representation of Australian agriculture, that will ensure smallholders can continue to support local food production and food security.

If you would like to discuss this further, you are welcome to contact me on 0422 429 362 or via email at president@afsa.org.au.

Sincerely,

Tammi Jonas

President
Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance

The Australian Food Sovereignty Alliance (AFSA) is a farmer-led civil society organisation of people working together towards socially-just and ecologically-sound food and agriculture systems that foster the democratic participation of Indigenous Peoples, smallholders, and local communities in decision making processes.

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