

WAFarmers 2016 Federal Election Scorecard – References

				
Safeguarding the agricultural supply chain	★ ★ ☆ ☆ ☆	★ ★ ★ ★ ☆	★ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆	
Investing in innovation, science, research and development	★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆	★ ★ ★ ★ ☆	★ ★ ☆ ☆ ☆	
Building a stronger workforce	★ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆	★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆	★ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆	
Prioritising agriculture at the top	★ ★ ☆ ☆ ☆	★ ★ ☆ ☆ ☆	★ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆	
Further developing the expansion of Australian trade	★ ★ ☆ ☆ ☆	★ ★ ★ ☆ ☆	★ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆	



KEY

Parties were rated on a scale of one to five stars, with one being a poor result. Ratings are represented in the table above as green stars.

Policy Priority One: Safeguarding the agricultural supply chain

- Australian Labor Party – two stars

The clearest indication of a commitment by the ALP towards safeguarding the agricultural supply chain was through the establishment of a six point Animal Welfare Policy. While at face value the six points appeared to ensure that the protection of animals was “a top priority for every industry that works with them”, as stated by Shadow Minister for Agriculture Joel Fitzgibbon, WAFarmers called the policies into question. While WAFarmers supported the need for transparency and accountability in the livestock industry and initiatives that have already been undertaken in this area, the main concerns were surrounding costs and unnecessary duplication of previous work and processes, such as the proposed review of ESCAS and the proposed establishment of an independent Office of Animal Welfare and Inspector General of Animal Welfare.

The ALP has reiterated that they do not support the move of the APVMA to Armidale, stating the relocation would likely hinder access to AgVet chemicals.

- The Coalition – four stars

The Coalition pledged commitment to a number of issues, most of which would affect Western Australia. They have proposed to implement a \$2 million commodity milk price index to introduce greater transparency and market signals for domestic and global milk prices and have signalled a commitment to forcing a price rise on big supermarkets unless they dumped their \$1.00 per litre home brand milk.

WAFarmers welcomed the Coalition’s pledge to ensure the Road Safety Remuneration Tribunal remains inactive and their promise that they would never introduce discriminatory mandatory payment rates that force owner-drivers out of business. Rural and regional WA relies almost entirely on road transport and already transport costs are a concern to our members and other people residing in these areas. If these rates increased by 30 per cent or more, the impact in rural and regional towns would be substantial. Significant funds were also pledged towards maintaining and upgrading local roads and bridges and supporting heavy vehicle safety programs.

Finally, the Coalition’s commitment to streamlining Commonwealth financing and concessional loan processing was welcomed, as it would strengthen existing processes and halt unnecessary duplication. Though WAFarmers awaits a thorough cost-benefit analysis before deciding whether the move of the APVMA to Armidale would be of benefit or detriment to the agricultural sector, we welcome the Coalition’s commitment of \$20 million for streamlined approval processes for AgVet chemicals.

- The Greens – one star

Similar to the ALP, The Greens’ election promises on this priority were few, and focused on animal welfare. WAFarmers recognises that animal welfare is an important aspect of primary production, however we do not agree with The Greens’ proposal to end live export trade.

Policy Priority Two: Investing in innovation, science, research and development

- Australian Labor Party – three stars

While the ALP has committed \$60 million towards the Mobile Black Spot Programme, which WAFarmers welcomes, they have not committed to funding the programme on an ongoing basis and WAFarmers feels this is risky as connection to reliable communications services is a high priority for voters this election. That said, their stated commitment to the NBN and the roll-out of fibre-to-premises instead of fibre-to-node would likely be welcomed by voters.

Investment in innovation would also be furthered by the ALP through the establishment of a Regional Innovation Fund to kick start a range of initiatives to expand the role of Australia's regions in contribution to the national innovation effort. Through this plan, up to 20 new accelerators would be established over three years, a sound commitment.

- The Coalition – four stars

The Coalition was the first to commit further funding to the Mobile Black Spot Programme, pledging an additional \$60 million towards the project. While WAFarmers welcomed this commitment, we recognise there is still much more work needed in this space to ensure that all Australians have access to reliable telecommunications services.

Significant contributions have also been pledged by the Coalition to support R&D, including:

- \$5.2 million to the RIRDC to administer a new R&D project to look at ways to secure pollination for a more productive agricultural sector.
- An additional \$15 million to expand the Incubator Support Programme to ensure more innovative businesses, particularly in regional and rural areas, are able to access the resources and networks needed to grow.
- \$5 million to the Leadership in Agricultural Industries Fund to build farmer representative organisations' capacities to lead the industry through transitional and structural adjustments that strengthen the long term viability of the sector, as well as communicating with farmers on questions regarding agricultural research and development levies.
- The establishment of Centres of Excellence in Agriculture in regional areas, with government agencies partnering with regional universities and industry research organisations to become agricultural research hubs.

Other commitments of interest included a \$2 billion national water infrastructure load facility to support major water infrastructure projects over 10 years, and increased funds for research on eradicating invasive pests and strengthening biosecurity and undertaking weed management.

- The Greens – two stars

Unlike the other two major parties, The Greens have not committed to ongoing funding for the Mobile Black Spot Programme. Given evidence that suggests this is a critical election issue for people in remote and regional areas, this is likely cause for concern for The Greens come election day. Innovation and R&D has been supported in the form of a \$75 million commitment to existing rural research and development corporations, plus \$100 million over four years to establish a new Centre for Sustainable Agriculture, but WAFarmers remains



concerned that it would not be enough to support the ever-increasing demand for Australian produce on local and international levels in the coming years.

Policy Priority Three: Building a stronger workforce

- Australian Labor Party – one star

It is widely considered that the backpacker tax is the key issue of this election for the agricultural sector when talking about building a stronger workforce, and the ALP's decision not to commit to reducing or scrapping the backpacker tax speaks loudly. While they have acknowledged that it was ill-conceived and that the tourism and agricultural sectors were ignored by the Coalition in its attempts to find a solution, it is not enough. They must commit to abolishing the tax otherwise the tax will begin on 1 July, causing significant damage to the agricultural industry, among others, and the Australian economy. Should the ALP come into power, they have promised to review backpacker visas within 100 days of forming government, however we would prefer for them to commit to removing the tax entirely.

The ALP would also make changes to the Seasonal Worker Program, removing the ability of employers to contract with their own choice of worker/s. This, alongside their decision to make public registers of labour hire companies and employers of workers from overseas, would like prevent uptake of the Seasonal Worker Program.

- The Coalition – three stars

WAFarmers welcomed the delay to 1 January 2017 of the backpacker tax, pending a whole-of-government review, and looks forward to continuing to work with industry to come to an alternative arrangement. It was not the preferred outcome, however we acknowledge that this commitment has secured the backpacker workforce for an additional six months and that without the delay, it would come into practice on 1 July this year.

The Coalition also committed \$200 million to establish a Regional Jobs and Investment package to deliver regional jobs and growth, while also pledging to leverage a further \$200 million in matched funding. This would likely work well towards attracting and retaining the brightest and best into agriculture, as long as the funds are used properly and in the areas of most need.

- The Greens – one star

Contrary to the ALP, The Greens have signified their strong support for the abolition of the backpacker tax and the establishment of an agriculture-specific work visa, both of which align to the WAFarmers' Policy Priority. The Greens have also called for a new network of 180 agricultural extension officers nationwide, however we do not feel like this is enough to build a strong workforce that can attract and retain the best and brightest.

Policy Priority Four: Prioritising agriculture at the top

- Australian Labor Party – two stars

Agriculture must be marked as a national economic and policy priority in order to capture the value of opportunities driven by growing local and international demand for our premium produce, and the ALP's election promises have been deemed as not strong enough to support this goal. They



have pledged to reverse measures implemented by the Coalition that tighten the Foreign Investment Review Board's monitoring of foreign investment in the farm and food sectors, and increase the current \$15 million measure to \$50 million and removing the \$55 million agribusiness screening category.

- The Coalition – two stars

While the Coalition has continued to work towards prioritising agriculture at the top and deliver on the promises made in the Agricultural White Paper, we fear progress is slowing. The opposite action is needed: support and development on a local level would exponentially increase production and Australian trade opportunities.

The current government's Federal Budget and election commitments to small business incentives and the extension of the small business threshold from a turnover of \$2 million gross income to \$10 million are very significant to our farmers, as this is the threshold that many WA farmers are in or will be in shortly as their businesses grow and we extend our agricultural potential. This will go some way in prioritising agriculture at the top.

- The Greens – one star

As with the ALP, The Greens have not committed enough to support the goal of marking agriculture a top priority - \$80 million over four years to strengthen local food systems and connect farmers to their communities is not enough, and while they have announced federal infrastructure funding by up to \$75 billion, WAFarmers remains concerned about how large a chunk of those funds will be allocated towards rural and regional Australia.

While some of their policies may be beneficial to the industry, the majority of them do not position agriculture at the top and would hinder the development of this sector, which is currently ideally positioned to be a key economic driver in the years to come.

Policy Priority Five: Further developing the expansion of Australian trade

- Australian Labor Party – two stars

As the Trans-Pacific Partnership ratification approaches, WAFarmers has questioned the ALP's ability to deliver on FTA's, in response to their preference to multilateral trade agreements and their approach on the China Australia Free Trade Agreement.

From a WA perspective, the ALP has committed \$2 million for logistics planning for the Kwinana Outer Harbour. Though welcome, more would be needed to ensure it meets the long-term economic requirements of the state.

- The Coalition – three stars

The combination of a pledge of \$8.3 million over four years to improve animal welfare in the live export industry through the implementation of the Livestock Global Assurance Program and a commitment to conclude trade agreements with many countries, launch FTA negotiations and explore



new opportunities including in the Indo-Pacific region have put The Coalition in a better position than the other two major parties when it comes to further developing the expansion of Australian trade.

- The Greens – one star

As indicated in Policy Priority One, The Greens stand for phasing out the live export trade, with their preferred action being to boost boxed meat exports. Their reasoning for this is that they believe the live export industry to be cruel and that the alternative would create thousands of jobs across regional Australia. While we do not doubt that they have done research to back up this claim, WAFarmers does not agree with their policy of phasing out live exports.

The Greens do not support the TPP, and while they do support the codification of the national interest test, they have not provided adequate definitions against which to measure the social, economic and environmental criteria.