



FTA SOS

**FARMERS FIGHT
FOR CHINA
TRADE DEAL**

By SIMONE SMITH and ROB HARRIS

AUSTRALIA'S farmers are launching a campaign to win support for a free-trade deal with China.

The last-ditch ploy is in response to growing concern that politicians and the public are failing to recognise the potential benefit of a deal with our biggest trading partner. It also comes after last week's damaging comments by renegade politician Clive Palmer, which some fear could jeopardise any agreement.

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Farmers send SOS on China

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Led by the dairy industry, farmers will next week launch a social media blitz to spell out the benefits of a China FTA.

The #FTA4farmers and #FTA4dairy campaign follows disappointment in dairy circles about the Japan trade agreement earlier this year.

However, government sources say dairy must take some blame for the poor Japan outcome, sending mixed messages during nego-

tiations.

Australian Dairy Farmers chief executive Natalie Collard said her organisation was now more aware of the importance of the “general public” as stakeholders in a national debate.

“Dairy is a bit of a hidden secret anyway, much of the population don’t understand,” Ms Collard said.

“It generates \$13 billion and the industry employs 43,000 as well as huge potential (to grow).”

She said with unemployment “the way it is” an FTA would benefit the public and Australian farmers.

Australia has a tariff disadvantage of up to 30 per cent on a “significant” amount of products going into China compared to New Zealand.

A recent Rabobank report warned a China free-trade deal would only be deemed a success if Australia can negotiate a complete phasing out of agriculture tariffs.

Some industry figures are concerned a deal may also be rushed because of the “ambitious” timeline set by the Federal Government to reach a deal by the end of the year.

The National Farmers’ Federation — which believes a strong deal “could set up Australian agriculture for the next 20 years” has given its

support to the farmer-driven campaign. Acting NFF chief executive Tony Mahar said it was important farmers were engaged in the benefits “at their farm gates and their kitchen tables”.

“The potential for Australian agriculture, including

dairy, from a Chinese trade deal is enormous,” he said.

Federal cabinet ministers were last week forced to extend an olive branch to what is already the nation’s biggest trading partner following fears Mr Palmer’s anti-China

rant could jeopardise free-trade talks.

Trade Minister Andrew Robb said comments by “someone in his position [are] ... extraordinarily unhelpful” which were not “in the interests of the Australian people”.

Mr Robb has previously said the Government has “placed priority on securing the type of outcome in FTA negotiations with China, that has served New Zealand so well”.

Mr Palmer yesterday wrote to the Chinese Am-



bassador offering a “most genuine and sincere” apology.

Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce said Mr Palmer’s original comments were “unhelpful” and the Government was trying to negotiate an agreement “that helps the Australian people, that facilitates a greater flow of income back to Australia”.

“In agriculture, this means more money across the kitchen table for Australian farmers,” he said.

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Get moving: Dairy farmers are leading a campaign to win support for a China FTA.