

FARMERS RELIEF

Wow!! Another year has gone by and we are still helping the farmers in our area, during the ongoing drought, but things are looking slightly better as at writing this report, drought wise.

The five original members have continued on for 2019-2020 with this year's President Patricia joining this very cohesive group. Thanks goes to the ongoing committee:

Gillian Reeve	Liaison & Communication
Rex Estoppey	Feed and fodder
Bonnie Walker	Publicity and logistics
John Walker	Logistics
Michelle Young	Treasurer extraordinaire

We started the new year with some leftover money from the previous one, not knowing if the generous donations would keep coming as the farmers were still in dire need of support. By the end of July the Rotary Club of Hasting/ Westernport started organising the bales of hay promised. Some was totally donated together with freight, other loads, a joint effort with our club and the remainder funded 100% by Bairnsdale. A great guy who had stepped up during 2018-2019, Paul from Trafalgar, carted several loads and refused to take any money, not even for petrol. He even organised 60 bales of silage which he transported to Bairnsdale, free of charge, thank you very much.

We realised that the donations were slowing down as many people perhaps thought that the drought had broken, some areas in Victoria had been receiving some decent rain, but there were several pockets in East Gippsland that completely missed out. Using what money we had, we purchased more hay and paid for transport on donated bales.

Encouraged by PDG Janne we made application through RAWCS for a matching grant of \$6000.00 as part of the Dick Smith Compassionate Grant system. We were successful and this enabled us to purchase bulka bags of pellets and more hay, primarily to assist the farmers in Munro, Stockdale, Glenaladale and Meerlieu areas, as they were still in drought conditions.

Once again, the Rotary Club of Lilydale, who were there at the beginning, kept an eye out for any donated hay, informing us and then we organized transportation. This included a donation of 300 bales of hay from the Water Board in Clyde, who delivered it freight free to Bairnsdale. This brought us some media coverage and Bonnie was the star on the Channel Nine news, don't let it go to your head!!



Then the bush fires hit, our farmers who were struggling to survive now had to look on as paddocks, hay, fencing and buildings were destroyed. PE Martin was keen to ensure that all clubs could pull together to assist where we could and contacted all the other clubs in our cluster. A meeting was held at AG Anne's house on 1 January 2020, a committee formed and away we went. This committee recognized the valuable contacts that Rex had made through organising hay etc and he stepped up to do that role as well as on our committee.

The fires were disastrous and as you can imagine all focus was on that, but we still had a commitment to look after our drought affected farmers, some of whom had not been in the fire zone. Luckily there was some crossover with farms affected by the fires who could tap into the monies being donated to the East Gippsland Rotary Fire Aid. Some of our financial supporters, mainly Rotary clubs both in and outside of our District still donated what they could, so we were able to continue. We received a donation that had to be used on assisting school children that had been affected and we were able, through the co-operation of the Swifts Creek and Omeo Primary Schools, to give this to deserving families who were struggling

Our own club still managed to donate over \$2000.00 this year through club raffles, fund raisers and the generosity of members who held functions and donated the money to Farmers Relief.

As at writing this report we have expended just about all of our funds for Farmers Relief, with delivering two tanker loads of molasses to the Ensay, Swifts Creek and Buchan areas, which will benefit about 40 farmers. We did the same thing last year and the farmers were very appreciative to have a supplement to assist with conditioning their cattle through winter.

District came to the aid of a farmer and his wife in the Stockdale/Munro area who were not only suffering through the drought conditions but had various health issues that had seen both in hospital. Thank you for providing much appreciated funds from the District Disaster Fund for this elderly couple.

We got some moving advertising when the local Futsal Team, The Bairnsdale Hay Balers, competed in a competition in Melbourne, captained by PE Martin, wearing the Farmer s Relief logo. Although they were not successful at the tournament, they were able to take our message to further afield.



Not even COVID-19 stopped our operations completely and we were able to get trucks of hay through to the Buchan area. One hopes that the drought will be have broken in several areas, but as stated in August 2018, we will be here till the end. Judging from the many thankyou notes and messages we have received, we know that our efforts are greatly appreciated by the East Gippsland community. It always make you proud to be a Rotarian when you see the difference you can make in your local community as well as overseas.

Some statistics on relief provided:		
	2019-2020	2018-2019
Large Hay Bales	744	446
Small Hay Bales	276	76
Bales held in storage	85	
Silage	8	60
Bulka Bags (pellets)		3
Magnesium Blocks		43
Dog Food (pallet)		1
Sheep Pellets x \$750	2	
Tankers of Molasses	2	2

What is not reflected in the figures is all the donated cartage or charged at a minimum cost, we could not have done it without all this help. A BIG shoutout goes to Donaldda Motors who for another 12 months have let us store our hay in their yard after they unload from the semis and load on the farmer’s transportation all with a smile on their face.

The Rotarian who has born most of the load this year is ever dependable Rex, ably assisted by wife Cec. It is hard to imagine the hours and hours he has spent on the phone, talking to farmers, assessing their needs and lending a sympathetic ear. We are so lucky to have this resource in our club and thank you once again from us all Rex, we could not have done this without you.

Bonnie Walker with her farming knowledge and contacts managed to keep on top of organising freight etc. another valuable resource that we could not have done without.

Another Rotarian who stepped up again this year handling all the finances is Michelle Young, who also took on the role as treasurer of the East Gippsland Rotary Fire Aid Committee. No one who is not a bookkeeper could understand the time and effort it takes to keep track of everything, pay all accounts and record every transaction for accurate reporting.

Gillian Reeve – Farmers Relief

