



# Circle way to beat waste

**PROMISING THOUGHT: Can we imagine a future where all beef sold in Tasmania comes from King Island farmers?**

## CUPPA TIA

IMAGINE a farm that produces no waste. Where any leftover agricultural biomass is used on the farm as a renewable resource.

This is one of the principles behind “circular agriculture”, a new way of thinking about agricultural production without negative environmental and social impacts.

The concept of circular agriculture has taken inspiration from the work of Bill Mollison and David Holmgren who first established permaculture principles in the 1970s at the University of Tasmania.

This is our agricultural future: scarce resources used sparingly, less biomass wasted, renewable energy used, fewer imports needed and energy consumption and greenhouse gases reduced.

Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture Director Professor Holger Meinke says the biggest global challenge today is

finding a way to feed a growing population both healthily and sustainably.

“Consumers want our farmers to be profitable. They also want food that is healthy and has minimal environmental impacts. We need to work with our farming communities and devise farming practices that will deliver these outcomes,” Professor Meinke said.

“We are doing this in Tasmania. But this is not just a local issue – it’s a global one – and we are actively looking to places like the Netherlands to see what we can learn from their approaches. I also expect that they can learn something from us.”

Right now, the Netherlands is transforming its agriculture sector to become a world leader in circular agriculture.

TIA PhD candidate Melle Nikkels said this was the most significant change in agricultural practice since World War II in the Netherlands.

“In the winter famine of 1945, many Dutch starved.

When the war was over, the Dutch government prioritised producing as much food as possible,” Mr Nikkels said.

“This way of working is not environmentally sustainable, so the agricultural footprint had to be analysed.

“Circular agricultural policy aims to have no direct and indirect negative impacts on biodiversity; it places a high priority on animal welfare, with the aim of farmers and society to better integrate.”

How will Dutch farmers in make the change?

“It’s not just up to farmers,” Mr Nikkels said.

“The government is asking everyone in the business community, civil society and government to get involved, to contribute ideas and to take initiatives.

“One incentive they are considering is that farmers contributing to the circular agriculture will get a premium on product.

“Income that is currently only based on production

would instead also be based on service to society, such as biodiversity, water security, quality and the smallest possible footprint.”

Can these initiatives have practical implications for Tasmania? In a circular agricultural system, resource flows minimising energy use are prioritised, making locally produced food more competitive.

Can we imagine a future where most of the beef sold in Tasmania comes from farmers on King Island? Or where all milk is from dairies that incorporate residuals from horticulture as feed for their cows?

What can we do to make our Tasmanian production systems more circular? Tweet your thoughts to @TasinAg.