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## MEDIA RELEASE

The Great South West Dairy Awards will return in 2012 with a new focus on environmentally sustainable farming practices.

The Natural Resource Management award, which has been a regular feature of the Awards program, will be expanded to recognise the region's Natural Resource and Sustainability Manager of the Year.

The awards, now in their seventh year, will be presented at the Glenormiston College on April 26.

Project manager Barb Collins said the award had been expanded to better recognise the importance of dairy farms working for an environmentally sustainable future.

"The award will now cover more areas of on-farm practices that promote sustainability," Mrs Collins said.

"It will recognise farmers who are planning for the future and ensuring sustainable practices will protect their land for future generations," she said.

Farms nominated for the award will be judged on improved sustainable practices, development and approaches implemented over the past 24 months.

Criteria for the award includes farmer management of soil health, fertiliser, effluent, irrigation, greenhouse gas emissions, native vegetation and waterways, energy and water in the dairy, pests & weeds chemicals and farm waste.

Mrs Collins said the industry placed great importance on the environment. "Dairy farmers realise they have to be responsible custodians of the land and this award will be an extra incentive for them to continue to improve their farming practices."

Nominations open on January 15 and close on February 17. Other categories include Employer of the Year, Employee of the Year, Share Farmer of the Year, Young Farm Leader of the Year, Farm Photo of the Year and nominations are being sought for the Dairy Industry Honour Board.

The first inductees on the honour board, who were announced in 2011, will be formally inducted at the Awards Gala Night. They are Noorat farmer Niel Black, Murray Goulburn Field Services Manager Pater Haynes, former Warrnambool Cheese and Butter Managing Director John McLean, Bessiebelle farmer John Pye, and farmer and organiser of the Sungold Field Days Tony Rea.

"The 2011 Awards were our most successful with record nominations, record sponsorship and record attendance at our Gala Night so we hope to match or exceed those targets in 2012," Mrs Collins said.