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MEDIA RELEASE

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Western Victoria is producing enough milk everyday to line up side by side one-litre cartons all the way from Melbourne to the South Australia border.

The region is now producing 2.1 billion litres of milk a year, close to a quarter of Australia's total output, and the dairy industry generated \$4.6 billion in 2008 for Western Victoria.

The figures have been revealed by WestVic Dairy chairman Roma Britnell in her annual report released on Friday at Port Fairy.

Ms Britnell said the industry was the region's major player, producing in 2008 about \$1 billion value on farm, another \$1b at processing facilities and \$2.6 billion generated within dairy service provider industries.

"That's nearly half the Rudd government's first stimulus package," she said.

Ms Britnell said 2008/2009 was an exceptional year for the region's dairy farmers, starting with record milk prices but suffering from step-downs caused by the impact of the Global Financial Crisis and ending with pessimistic profit forecasts.

Input price drops and favourable weather cushioned the blow to a degree but Ms Britnell admitted "the year finished with the realisation that 2009/10 would be a tough one".

Ms Britnell said the Board existed to advance the dairy industry in south-west Victoria and 2008/09 represented the biggest ever effort to canvas the views of farmers and industry stakeholders in developing the industry's strategic plan "Down the Track".

"This plan has guided our investment this year and will for the following four years," she said.

Ms Britnell said WestVic Dairy would continue to invest in ways to help the industry over the next year, particularly focusing on projects that addressed financial issues in the wake of the milk price drop.

During 2008/9, WestVic Dairy invested farmer levies in dairy farm small grants, research into better feeding cow systems and using first pond sludge, farm management discussion groups, newsletters and other dairy communications, dairy awards, and modelling future dairy farm business results.

It also attracted significant funding to the region's farmers. During 2008/09 about \$600,000 of service levy was available for investment and that helped attract about a further \$2 million to the region.

Ms Britnell said this leverage ensured farmers were getting even better value for their levy investment.

Executive Officer Mike Weise said WestVic Dairy had allocated levy money against the highest farmer priorities and delivered projects to address those priorities.

He said WestVic Dairy had had been active in moving dairying high on the agenda of regional leaders, councils and community members. "Having regional leaders well informed about dairy and advocating for us offers strong benefits to dairy in Western Victoria," he said.

R I C K B A Y N E

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