



MEDIA RELEASE

Gippsland Community Celebration of new *Strengthening Small Dairy Communities* initiative

The Gardiner Foundation and the South Gippsland Shire Council, in collaboration with GippsDairy, have joined together in a partnership to implement a new ***Strengthening Small Dairy Communities*** Program in South Gippsland. Partner communities in the program will be Buffalo, Dumbalk, Fish Creek, Koonwarra, Meeniyan, Stony Creek, Tarwin Lower and Venus Bay.

A community celebration of the new partnership was held in Tanderra Park, Meeniyan, to bring together community representatives, dairy farmers, program partners and representatives of key dairy and educational organisations.

Speakers who welcomed guests included the newly appointed Mayor of South Gippsland Shire Council, Councillor Warren Raabe and Ned Dennis, Community Strengthening Coordinator from the Council. Commenting about the new partnership to deliver the Program in Gippsland, Cr. Raabe said "Small dairying communities have been suffering from population decline with increasing farm size and productivity, and an aging population." He added "This injection of funds will greatly assist the South Gippsland Shire Council to help these communities stabilise and indeed flourish into the future. We hope to develop templates for whole of community planning which can easily be transferred to other small rural communities, thus benefiting the whole State into the future."

Paul Ford, CEO of the Gardiner Foundation was delighted to see a strong and enthusiastic gathering of community representatives and key partners who will be involved in the implementation of the ***Strengthening Small Dairy Communities*** program. Mr Ford said "This is an exciting new and different program for the Foundation, and builds on ten years of delivering a wide range of projects benefiting dairy people and communities in rural Victoria through our Community and People Development Program".

The final speaker was Stacey Gardiner, daughter of the late Geoffrey Gardiner (after whom the Foundation was named) who spoke about her family's connection with the region, her continuing interest in the dairy industry and the benefits she felt would flow to the communities from the type of program being undertaken.

Strengthening Small Dairy Communities is a 4 year \$1.65 million program, commencing as a pilot in partnership with the South Gippsland Shire Council and GippsDairy from December 2010, with design and development of the Program taking place through 2011.

The Program aims to build the ongoing capability of small dairy communities to direct and support their own advancement, attract and retain investment, and thus directly contribute to the growth and resilience of their communities and the dairy industry.

The four components of the Program are:

- Self-assessment and priority setting
- Skills development
- Community improvement projects
- Sustainable impact

Around two thirds of people engaged in the dairy industry live in and contribute to small rural communities of fewer than 5,000 people. With around 270 small dairying communities in Victoria, many facing significant challenges, this is an important issue for dairy.

After the initial pilot Program in South Gippsland, Gardiner's ***Strengthening Small Dairy Communities Program*** will also be implemented in the Northern and Western Victorian dairy regions between 2012 and 2014.



Photo captions (print quality available – see below)

1. Left to right: Cr Warren Raabe, Mayor of South Gippsland Shire Council, Paul Ford, CEO Gardiner Foundation, Ailsa Fox, Jnr Vice President, Victorian Farmers Federation, John Hutchinson, GippsDairy Regional Coordinator/Jaydee Events and Stacey Gardiner, daughter of the late Geoffrey Gardiner and Mrs Kerry Gardiner.
2. The community celebration at Tanderra Park, Meeniyan.
3. A community effort – catering provided by the Australian Red Cross Meeniyan!

Media contacts:

Paul Ford, Chief Executive, Gardiner Foundation

**Kate Randall, Program Manager, Community and People Development and Donor Relations
Gardiner Foundation – Tel. 03 9606 1900 or info@gardinerfoundation.com.au**

**Ned Dennis, Community Strengthening Co-ordinator, South Gippsland Shire Council
Tel. 03 5662 9288 or nedd@southgippsland.vic.gov.au**

Print quality photos available on request to Cynthia.Mrigate@gardinerfoundation.com.au.

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