



MEDIA RELEASE

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COMMUNITY CELEBRATES NEW GARDINER GRANTS FOR MEENIYAN, VENUS BAY AND TARWIN LOWER

Meeniyana Recreation Reserve, the Venus Bay/Tarwin Lower Men's Shed, and the Riverside Community Retirement Villas Cooperative at Tarwin Lower, have all been successful in winning grants from the Gardiner Foundation.

These grants, presented at a community celebration at the Buffalo Hall on 10th November, are the first community project grants to be awarded by the Foundation in its **Strengthening Small Dairy Communities** pilot program in South Gippsland's Lower Tarwin Valley district. This new program is being delivered in partnership with South Gippsland Shire Council and GippsDairy, and in collaboration with the Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development. The Strengthening Small Dairy Communities program aims to build the ongoing capability of small dairy communities to direct and support their own advancement and attract new investment. It combines community planning and priority-setting, specialized training in grant-seeking and project planning and management, and provides real grants that enable community members to practice their new skills and build confidence.

The three new grants were presented by the Gardiner Foundation's Chief Executive, Paul Ford, and South Gippsland Shire Council Mayor, Warren Raabe. Community members from across the Lower Tarwin Valley district were in attendance.

The **Tarwin Lower, Venus Bay and District Men's Shed** won a \$5,000 grant to support the conversion of the Men's Shed to solar power. The Men's Shed promotes social inclusion and mental health and wellbeing for men in rural communities where many experience isolation. Men meet at the shed regularly to work on construction projects that benefit the community. President Don Kennedy said "We provide a service to the local community, and we are here to assist and advise on any tasks when required. We want to create an environment where men can continue their skills and also teach others."

The Men's Shed plans to grow its membership and build a community garden in the near future. The installation of solar panels will help reduce the Shed's carbon footprint and energy costs, allowing funds to be diverted to more activities for members.

The **Meeniyana Recreation Reserve** will receive up to \$10,000 towards a major community fundraising campaign to seal the road from the second entrance around the oval and the car park. Meeniyana Recreation Reserve is used by up to 600 people per week, including the local football and netball clubs, cricket, tennis, bowls archery, yoga, bridge and an amateur drama group. Sealing the road will eliminate the mud and pot-holes during the wetter seasons, and will significantly improve the comfort of users during summer when dust clouds are a major problem. It will also make the area more accessible for users with mobility issues, and will reduce maintenance costs by around \$4,000 per annum.

The Recreation Reserve Committee is highly motivated and aims to raise \$120,000 over the next two years to complete this task. Secretary Faye Sinclair said “Good sporting and recreational facilities are a core value for dairy farming communities. They provide people with the enjoyment of team sports and exercise as well as an environment where families can socialize and enjoy togetherness. They are vital parts of the fabric of country living.”

Riverside Community Retirement Villas is a new initiative being driven by a co-operative of more than 50 members in the Tarwin Lower and Venus Bay communities. The co-op is developing a new 20-unit retirement village at Tarwin Lower, in partnership with South Gippsland Shire Council. The Gardiner Foundation grant of \$10,000 will support the co-op to secure land and permits, and to commission plans.

Nearly half of the population in the area is over the age of 50 years, and currently there is little opportunity for people to remain in the area as they encounter health complications or require extra care as they age. Many are forced to move to larger towns away from friends and family. Chairperson of the cooperative, Roger Watkin, said “The Villas will provide retirees with a safe, secure and environmentally friendly home to live in amongst friends. We have had 3 public forums as well as discussions at community events, and the response has been overwhelmingly positive.”

The Gardiner Foundation will announce its **second round of community project funding for the Lower Tarwin Valley district in February 2012**, coinciding with another series of free training workshops delivered by Our Community. These workshops will provide practical skills in finding grants and other funding, project planning and budgeting, and working with a diverse team to get the right skill balance to deliver the project.

Two-thirds of the dairy industry’s workforce lives in communities of under 5,000 people, and there are more than 200 of these small dairy communities in Victoria. Gardiner Foundation Chief Executive Paul Ford said “The **Strengthening Small Dairy Communities** program recognizes that the resilience and vibrancy of small dairy communities is critical to the sustainability of our industry. This funding program is different because it teaches people how to fish, instead of just giving them a fish.”

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