

NEWS

Farmers warn of unfair costs

By **Joanne Fosdike**

A SAD picture of farming was painted in Murray Bridge last week as farmers spoke candidly about their struggles before a State Government Select Committee investigation on sustainable farming.

Morelands farmer and agriculture teacher Peter Henry said high costs and low returns were hitting farmers hard and leading to unsustainable farming.

"Sustainable farming leaves the land in the same, or a better state, than when you took it over," he said.

"To have sustainable farming practices you have to have sustainable farming communities."

Mr Henry said large corporations and supermarkets were underpaying for produce at market and then selling it at an exorbitant cost to the consumer.

"Farmers require fair

prices to farm sustainably - not deserve - but require fair prices," he said.

"They need politicians

who will listen and watch out for them."

Mr Henry said he had done his homework and figures showed it costs him \$2.80 per kilogram to raise a lamb for sale but he only receives \$2.50kg at market - yet lamb was selling at the supermarket for almost \$16kg.

He said someone was making a lot of money, but it was not farmers.

Mr Henry said he was not surprised farming was going out of fashion with Australian Bureau of Statistics showing the average wage for farm-

ers was \$568 per week for an average of 49 hours work while it was \$921 for the rest of the population.

Angaston farmer Malcolm Fetchner told the committee that it was time Federal and State governments pro-

tected primary food producers.

"They (farmers) work to feed all in the community without protection in legislation," he said.

"There is no code of practice to protect farmers.

"The farms shouldn't be going to overseas

investors because Australian farmers have been screwed."

Mr Fetchner said it should be a farmer's right to pass on legitimate costs to the middleman, like Glencore, who set the prices they pay to farmers rather than the other way around.

"There should be a bright future so input costs can be recovered with a margin so farmers can provide for their own families," he said.

"The Government will lose their economic base if primary producers do not remain viable."



Spilling the beans: Select Committee members Susan Close and Adrian Pederick hear of the struggle farmers are facing during a forum in Murray Bridge on Wednesday.