

Champions of the Bush – Opinion Piece

Science - the health and well-being of our regions

The importance of science has been long appreciated by those of us in regional industry, but not, it would seem, by many in the national news media.

Monash University recently released the results of research which showed that a daily small serve of dairy food reduced, rather than increased, the risk of mortality from cardiovascular disease, and especially stroke, even in communities, such as Chinese communities, where dairy foods have not traditionally formed part of the diet.

The research, which was based on a study of 4000 Taiwanese, showed that those who ate no dairy food had higher blood pressure, higher body mass index and greater fatness generally than other groups.

But the Taiwanese who included dairy food in their diet 3 to 7 times per week were more likely to survive than those who ate none.

These findings, which were published in the prestigious Journal of the American College of Nutrition, have gone largely unreported in Australia, despite extensive and ongoing coverage of them in overseas news and scientific journals as well as in dairy industry-related publications such as the Swiss-based Nestle Research Foundation.

Only one Australian national daily has given any attention to the Monash release of this research and this comprised just 3 paragraphs at page 11.

This is all the more surprising because the scientist who led the research is an eminent Australian. He is Professor Mark Wahlqvist, from Monash University's Department of Epidemiology and Preventative Medicine.

Media indifference to scientific research produces indifference at a government level.

This, in turn, translates into a downgrading of the science portfolio and reduced government funding of R and D in agriculture and related regional industries.

The outcome is an erosion of the competitiveness of Australian regional industry and the sale of agricultural and other assets to overseas interests who know how best to deploy them because they are from countries with a greater interest in science and innovation.

Greg Walsh, Chairman of Champions of the Bush. 21 October, 2014.