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The certainty of death, taxes and the viability of agriculture

Nothing is certain but death and taxes: the proverb about the unavailability of tax is attributed to many sources, reflecting the fact that regulation (including tax) impacting on farm business sustainability is “a many-headed monster originating from multiple legislative agendas and political platforms”, says Australian Farm Institute Executive Director Richard Heath.

The 2018 Spring edition of the AFI *Farm Policy Journal* released this week focuses on tax and regulation for farm business sustainability. The papers included in this issue make it clear there are multiple tax and regulatory issues impacting on farm business performance, management and sustainability. What also emerges from these five papers is that there are multiple ways of addressing those issues.

Articles included in the Spring 2018 Journal are:

- **‘Taxation for the economy and agriculture’**, by John Freebairn, University of Melbourne
- **‘Tax policy considerations for Australian agriculture’**, by Dale Miller and Amelia Shaw, AgForce
- **‘Using FMDs to create sustainable farm businesses’**, by Brian D Wibberley, chartered accountant and specialist financial advisor
- **‘Does renewable energy sustain Australian agriculture, or drive it offshore?’**, by Geoff Carmody, Geoff Carmody & Associates
- **‘Australia needs a feasible business model for rural conservation’**, by Paul Martin, Australian Centre for Agriculture and Law, University of New England.

These papers give an overview and some specific deep dives into areas of policy which farm businesses are exposed to today.

Some contrasting views are put forward, reflecting the fact that policy for tax and regulation will perhaps always be unlikely to result in consensus. In the absence of consensus, Mr Heath said, certainty is the next best option – but unfortunately the modern political climate is not conducive to certainty either, and it seems increasingly difficult to make substantial change to harmonise and simplify the tax and regulatory system.

So how to navigate a path forward for agriculture in this environment?

“The role of the Australian Farm Institute through this journal, and indeed all our work, is to promote an informed debate in which advocates for agriculture have the facts at hand to advance policies which enable farmers and the wider sector to operate in a profitable and sustainable manner,” Mr Heath said.

“Because, while death and taxes are certain, so is the certainty that fair taxation and regulation to deliver a viable agriculture sector will provoke intense and varied opinion.”

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