Chris Blore:

I'm Chris Blore from Agriculture Victoria, Meat and Wool Services. And I want to thank you all for joining this morning. Thank you for coming along to this grant opportunities for beef and sheep producers, part of our webinar series. This morning we have Peter Harrison and Emily Witham from our Agriculture Policy team. They deliver and do the admin for the grant process. And they're very happy to help you get your grants up and through the process. Also from Northmore Gordon, we have Mark Barber and Remi Cesaro. Remi can correct his name when I got it wrong. That's okay. They are one of the energy auditors.

Chris Blore:

So, if you do undertake this process, they may be the people that come out to your farm or over the phone, depending on whether Remi can get back from Singapore to do an energy audit and help you through the process of what your application might look like. They're just one of the companies available, and I'm not sure if Peter has managed to join us yet this morning, but Peter August is a producer who was successful in a round one grants, and he will just go through his process and how he found the process for you as a producer and what opportunities there might be for you. So with that very simple introduction, I'd like to hand over to Peter Harrison to go through the Agriculture Energy Investment Plan and the opportunities for beef and sheep producers. Thank you, Peter.

Peter Harrison:

Thanks, Chris. I might just actually defer to Emily.

Emily Witham:

Yeah. Great. So I'll just provide you with a really quick overview of the history of the program and where it's at now and what's available. So this program was originally launched in 2018 off the back of a survey with the Victorian Farmers Federation in 2017, just to get a better understanding about what some of the key issues were for farm businesses around reducing energy costs and adaptation of on-farm energy opportunities. So, the program was really successful and ended up being oversubscribed and applications for on-farm energy assessments closed in March of 2020, and the applications for grants closed in June. So we were fortunate enough to receive an additional $30 million in last year's budget. And we were able to reopen the program in March, and we've made a couple of tweaks to this program based on the learnings from previous years.

Emily Witham:

So this year, or when we've launched the program, it includes... The main focus of the program is still on-farm energy efficiency. But this time have also included things such as productivity improvements, looking at energy and water efficiency gains, and also taking into consideration things such as productivity and emission and waste reduction. So we launched the program in March. Applications for on-farm energy assessments close on the 15th of July, and then applications for grants at this point in time are closing on the 15th of December or whenever funds are fully expended. So it may close a little earlier.

Emily Witham:

The key components of the program is it's structured into on-farm energy assessments and grants. So having an on-farm energy assessment is a requirement to be able to receive a grant under the program. So there's two types of on-farm energy assessments that you apply for, and these are free. So there's a type one on-farm energy assessment, which is for businesses that have energy bills between 8,000 and 25,000 and type two on-farm energy assessments for farm businesses, with energy bills over 25,000,. The energy bills is comprised of your electricity, your gas and your on-farm diesel that isn't related to just driving a vehicle around the farm.

Emily Witham:

So, if it's related to harvest or anything like that, it's considered eligible, but if you're driving your ute across the farm or between properties or just moving hay bales, then that wouldn't be considered an eligible energy expenditure. So what happens in this process is that you're able to apply for an on-farm energy assessment, the department review it and then you are issued with a voucher and an assessor is allocated to you. And an example of that would be Mark and Remi in Northmore Gordon. They might be allocated to you. They would then give you a call and they set up a time to commence the on-farm energy assessment. And I'll let Mark go through some more of that a little bit later, once you've received your on-farm energy assessment, you'll often find a list of known low cost measures on your farm that you might implement that will have some level of energy savings for you.

Emily Witham:

And then you might also see larger items that have been identified on your on-farm energy assessment that are eligible for you to apply for a grant. When you get to the point of applying for a grant, there's three levels of grants that you're able to apply for. The first is a fast track rebate, in order to be eligible for a fast track rebate, you must have had an on-farm energy assessment done under the Agriculture Energy Investment Plan, either in the previous year or under this year's program. They are for grants of up to $20,000. All of our grants require a co-cash contribution, meaning that if you would like $20,000 from us for a grant, your business at a minimum has to also be putting in $20,000. So the fast-track rebates, if you speak to the department or send us an email, or once you've received your completed on-farm energy assessment, we'll send you a link to that. That allows you to make purchases that are exactly aligned to your on-farm energy assessment.

Emily Witham:

So, for example, if your recommended 10 kilowatts of solar in your on-farm energy assessment, and you then go and purchase 10 kilowatts of solar, then you can seek a rebate for that and we'll reimburse you for those purchases that have been made. We then go into our grants that require you to have an application. You can't have commenced a project or made any purchases until your grant has been approved. So for the grants, there's a Tier one grant, which is grants up to $50,000. And then there's a Tier two grant which are grants from $50,000 to 25, sorry, to $250,000. Now for a type one grant, you can have received a... Sorry for a Tier one grant or a fast track rebate. You can receive a type one or a type two on-farm energy assessment. If you're looking to apply for a tier two grant, you must have received a type two on-farm energy assessment.

Emily Witham:

So, that's a quick overview of what's available under the program. If you had received an on-farm energy assessment under the previous program, you're still eligible to apply for a grant under this program. If you had received a grant under the last program, but not to the full value of what you're eligible for. So for example, if you had received a type two on-farm energy assessment and you received a grant of a $100,000 under the last program, you're eligible to apply for an additional $150,000 under this program. So, I think that's probably the main things to go through. You need to apply through the Agriculture Victoria website. Once you click onto the relevant link, you'll then be transferred through to the Business Victoria website. Just need to make sure you've got your ABN. And when you're applying for an on-farm energy assessment to make sure you've got your energy bills, that can be uploaded and that you've also got all of your meter numbers available. Peter, I might pause there and see if there's anything you would like to add before we are flick across to Mark and Remi.

Peter Harrison:

Oh, thanks Em. Morning, everyone. My name is Peter Harrison. I actually process most of the grant applications that come through. I do the assessments primarily for the tier two grants. The number one thing is I'm also the liaison point for farmers within the program. So just a couple of things I'll add. The eligibility criteria under the program is that basically you're a farmer that operates a property in Victoria. Now, if you're a farmer that lives in South Australia or New South Wales and the property is in Victoria, we base it on where the property is located, not on where your registered business address is or where you might resort. So we do the assessments and the grants based on the property and the location and the needs of the property. So that's the basic eligibility criteria. It's for farmers who have energy costs of 8,000 dollars or more and that covers diesel, electricity and gas.

Peter Harrison:

So, the majority of the broadacre farmers, graziers have come in at tier two level, which is $25,000 or more mainly because of their diesel use, but it's unique to each farm as to where you'll actually fit, but you don't need to get too stressed about that because we work that out for you. So the processes Em's alluded to, it's an online process. We don't accept applications in paper format. So basically you have to go into the website, go into the link and complete the application online. The thing that we'd probably need to be mindful of this is not a 24-hour turnaround program. It will take probably four to six weeks to process the application and for the energy assessor to make contact with you. And then it could take another four weeks to six weeks after that, depending on whether you're doing a type one or a type two energy assessment.

Peter Harrison:

So, we're talking probably two to three months from start to finish in that process. So it's important to be aware of that because if you are in the process of installing something and you think you might put a grant application in, if you've already commenced work on the project, or you've already installed the equipment it's not eligible under the program, because you actually haven't had the funding approved, so you must wait to commence the install until you actually have the grant approved. Emily's mentioned the key dates, the on-farm energy assessments close on the 15th of July. Now I would encourage anyone who's interested to lodge an application as soon as you can for that. Just as an idea, in the last six weeks of the previous program, 70% of the applications were received. So we had hundreds of applications to get through, and that pushes the timelines out, not only for processing, but it also pushes the timeline out for the energy assessors.

Peter Harrison:

So, get in early and avoid the rush because human nature is, if the date says the 15th of July, you'll start completing the application on the 10th. So the grant applications close on the 15th of December. So there is plenty of time there to get the energy assessment done, get your quotes organized and lodge an application. Now, I need to emphasize it's the applications that close on these dates. So as long as you get the application in before those dates, then we will still be processing it. It's not like they have to be approved by that date. So very important, just make sure you get those in.

Peter Harrison:

The other thing, which I've asked Sarah and Chris to do. Don't get too wound up in the process and worrying about it because Sarah and Chris will provide my direct contact details. If you need to talk through this after this meeting, or you just want to talk to someone in a bit more detail, just pick up the phone, give me a call and on more than that, I'm happy to talk to you all day, they actually pay me to do it, which is a great job.

Peter Harrison:

So I'll help you through the application process. I'll also help you with deciding what grants you may be looking at. Talk through which particular application you may need to lodge. And also as we move through the implementation stage, I'm your point of contact there, so please feel free to pick up the phone or drop me an email. If you leave a voicemail, I will get back to you. It may not be immediately, but I always try and get back on the same day. All right. So that's an overview. So basically if you guys are on this call, if you're on a property in Victoria, you're eligible. Alright Chris, Sarah over to you.

Chris Blore:

Thank you, Peter. Thank you, Emily. So yeah, you can see Peter's details are there. So we will send this out at the end with a follow up email. So don't feel like you have to race around for a pen. And with that, I'd like to hand over to Mark and Remi. So Mark, if you want to take over and go through what Northmore Gordon has to offer.

Mark Barber:

Thank you, Chris and good morning, everybody. And I think we've got some slides to present, Sarah, is that right. Thank you. So myself and Remi are energy consultants from a firm called Northmore Gordon, we're specialists in helping farms and large industrial facilities reduce their energy consumption and carbon footprint. That's all we do. We're a team of about 30 based in Melbourne and Sydney and Singapore, and we're stocked by a large number of engineers of various sorts and we have a lot of industrial background. We are one of several companies that are on the panel to provide audit services under this program. Next slide, please. So we're just going to quickly cover these three points. What's involved in assessment. Some thoughts about what you guys can do to make the process a bit easy. And we also wanted to just run through some typical opportunities to reduce energy consumption and energy costs. Next slide, please.

Mark Barber:

So the audit process. So it's really a four-step process. And it really centers on the very important personal onsite farm visit and discussion with the farms staff onsite. But before we can do that, we would issue a detailed data request. We really need to understand your energy consumption, diesel and electricity, and any other fuel that you might be using over the last year or two. And the more we know about exactly where you're using it, how you're using it and when you're using it, the more useful we can be to you. We'll also need equipment lists and a range of information that we would require to understand your business, which we’ll send through in writing. And there'll be a few phone calls, but this is all about preparing us for the site visit. So by the time we arrive to the site, we understand the business, we understand what your needs are and what your particular issues are about energy and any existing ideas you already have about where you think you'd like to make improvements or what upgrades you think you might want to make.

Mark Barber:

Then we tee up a time with you to visit the site, where we probably spend three hours or so with you on the farm, obviously organize a time that's convenient to you. We're quite flexible. And during that time, we dig deeper. We really want to understand the business well and where energy's used and where it might be being wasted. We may even also, in some cases, bring equipment such as thermal cameras, electricity loggers. We might install some additional measurement equipment to gather more detailed data. And by the time we leave that site, we have a much better understanding about the way energy's used and had detailed discussions with you and maybe generated a short list of likely opportunities for improvement. We then go away. We take the information that we've learned from that visit and from you and do some detailed analysis. We'll generate a list, a master list of potential improvement opportunities.

Mark Barber:

And our job is to establish a budget prices for the upgrades or purchases, and also estimates on the savings of energy and the payback time. That may require some interaction with some of your equipment vendors to get some more detailed pricing. We then provide that to you in a final report and over the phone discussion to help make decisions around how are you going to prioritize the recommendations. And the outcome of that process includes electricity tariff review. So we're interested to make sure that they'll give you advice about whether the tariffs you're paying for electricity are appropriate and competitive, and some advice on how to maybe get a better price.

Mark Barber:

For each of the opportunities to be identifiable, obviously put in writing a description of the opportunity, estimated cost savings and benefits, some implementation suggestions and enough information to enable you to put together an application to the department for a grant. It's also worth noting that part of our role, I'd like to emphasize that we don't sell equipment we're consultants only. We have no vested interest in trying to recommend any particular equipment or size of equipment. I think a good example of the importance of that is around sizing of solar systems. So our interest is in making sure that a solar PV array is sized correctly, not too big, not too small. We're not interested in seeing systems too large being installed. So with that, I might hand over to Remi, who's got more hands-on experience than I have in actual assessments. And he can talk to you about the typical opportunities we find on sheep and beef farms. So I'll hand over to you please, Remi.

Remi Cesaro:

Thank you, Mark. Good morning, everyone. So what we're going to do now, I'm going to go through three typical categories of opportunities that we typically identify for sheep and beef farms. I have no intention to be exhaustive, but it does cover probably 80% of everything we can typically see for this type of farms. The very first one is meant to be around irrigation systems. So when we talk about irrigation systems, we first have to acknowledge the fact that pumping systems are designed for specific application, specific flow rate, specific head. The reality is that times change, situation and circumstance change, and sometimes pumping system are not quite suitable anymore for the application or technology change. So when we do a site visit and when we do an analysis, our first goal is actually to find out how efficient and how well the current pumping system perform.

Remi Cesaro:

And there's basically two ways you can address an irrigation system. The first one is, is there ways you can actually reduce the use of water? And the second is, is there a way you can improve the performance of your existing system? In terms of reducing the use of water, it's mostly around a control and automation of your system by irrigating at night, for instance, in order to reduce the evaporation from the soil. It can be around optimizing the irrigation system itself by having different nozzles, different spacing and height for your pivot irrigator and can also be around increasing the water retention of the soil, typically is through alternative grazing practices. On the pump efficiency side, what we are typically looking for is, is there any ways that we can minimize back pressure? It is quite often that we see partially closed valve on a discharge side of pumps to increase the static pressure of the system. And the reality is, there are ways you can completely and fully open those valves, reduce the friction loss while still maintaining a high efficiency from your system.

Remi Cesaro:

The question also is can we reduce the flow rate of your pump in order to minimize friction losses? Again, irrigators can be an opportunity to optimize the use of the pump upstream. And finally, is there an opportunity for the replacement of the entire pumping system with technology which is more efficient? So that's energy efficiency, how to achieve the same level of quality and performance, but consuming less energy. You have another side, which is a sourcing of energy. So is your pump powered with a diesel engine or with an electric engine and for this particular electric engine, is there a way you can reduce the cost of energy? So that's typically where we talk about electrification of diesel systems. So it is quite often that in beef and sheep farms, you have pumping systems which are remote with no immediate electric supply and they typically run with a diesel generator or a direct driven diesel motor.

Remi Cesaro:

These are motors, as a rule of thumb, have 30% efficiency. An electric motor as a rule of thumb has 90% or 80% efficiency. So going to electric can be a significant source of energy savings. Now we need to highlight the fact that upgrading from diesel power motors or pump to electric power motor is not a straightforward answer. You need to be very specific and clear whether or not on how often you run the systems and how much energy you can effectively save. And finally, and I think there will be a case study afterward, you can actually consider to have a hybrid system of solar PV electric and diesel generated power for your pumping systems, which can save also a lot of energy, a lot of cost and improve reliability and control of the pumping system. I could talk a lot more and be more technical, but I would just stay there. And of course, if you have any question during this presentation, please feel free to enter them into the chat box. So that's for irrigation system. So irrigation systems can be easily 50 to 80% of the energy cost.

Remi Cesaro:

So the next major item is around machinery. Machinery typically refers to all equipment, such as tractors that are used for tilling, spraying of herbicides and fertilizers, which are typically used on the farm. The question we have here is, is there a way for you to use less of those machines and/or to use them more efficiently? So typically what we're talking about here is diesel consumption of those engines, of the tractors. The first thing you have to do is due diligence on the maintenance of your equipment, make sure that the tires are correctly pressurized, make sure that the engine is correctly checked, the oil level is correct. That sounds like very basic opportunities, but actually do save a lot of energy in the long-term. The next stage is, is there a way for you to use less of those machines? So typically when you are doing the preparation of the land with the spraying of fertilizer or herbicides, you will typically have tanks attached to the tractor that you will go around the paddocks to spray the liquids.

Remi Cesaro:

Is there a way for you to have larger tanks, so you have to do less back and forth to the farm, to refill the tank? Another one, which is actually quite common right now is the use of smart sprayers. So typically if we talk about herbicides, having machines that can detect weed and spray only when required. This kind of machine can drastically reduce the use of fertilizer and of course reduce the number of back and forth we have to do between the paddock and the farm for refilling. You have also different practices, such as efficient tilling to reduce the consumption of diesel by the tractor. You can use to have a weighed bridge directly at the farm in order to minimise the back and forth to a different facility for the weighting of equipment.

Remi Cesaro:

And finally, quite similar to the first one that I've mentioned, you can have larger grain bins on the tractor in order to minimize the number of back and forth to the farm to refill the grain to be spread on the paddock. And finally, a smaller part in this is around the bag in-loaders and out-loaders when the grain is stored at the farm. So typically there's larger opportunities as well, so diesel consumption from equipment can be a significant part of your energy expenditure and working on new technologies and different practices for the use of those machines can significantly again, reduce the use of diesel.

Remi Cesaro:

And now we go to the last part of this presentation that is solar PV systems. So I will guess that many of you in this call have received requests or interests from installing solar PV systems. So solar PV systems are interesting, depending on your application and depending on the way you can use it. So a typical one, of course, is for all electrical systems that you have in your farm, which include a shedding, garage, electric system, lighting and so on. A PV system will typically be an interesting opportunity to have. Of course, the next one that I've mentioned quickly, briefly earlier, was the use of solar PV systems to power irrigation systems. And there the payback can usually be extremely good.

Remi Cesaro:

Now, a few key things to have in mind, the sizing of your solar PV system is extremely important and you will most likely face a situation where you have a conflict of interest in the engineering design of a solar PV system and the financial benefit of it. Under this energy efficiency grant, systems should be designed to minimize export to the grid. The reality is that the feed-in tariff in Victoria is still very generous and therefore make oversized system relatively financially interesting. So when you are suggested to install solar PV system, it is unfortunately quite often we hear suppliers to sell and to suggest massively oversized solar PV systems and under the program, we will recommend something that will most likely be smaller just in order to minimize the electricity that you export to the grid.

Remi Cesaro:

Now also a thing you want to know or be aware of at least is even if you install an oversized system, some distributors have a cap on the maximum solar export you can generate. Therefore, if that is the case, oversizing the PV system might be actually a waste of money and a waste of time. When you want to install a solar PV system and that is beyond the actual audit itself, so once you have made the decision you want to install the solar PV system, make sure you install a solar PV system that is of good quality. They have hundreds of system out, hundreds of brands and companies.

Remi Cesaro:

One particular key criteria you can use as a way to judge of the quality of a solar PV system is how long is the warranty. As an example, what you should typically expect is 25 years warranty on the solar panels and 10 years warranty on the inverter. Anything below that, you might question the quality of it. Batteries can be of interest. So far most of the time we have seen batteries were still quite expensive and not so much relevant, but in some cases, batteries can actually be cheap and therefore relevant, financially speaking, for the implementation in a farm.

Remi Cesaro:

And of course with battery system you can actually have... With battery system, it can actually be an opportunity for you to improve the supply and reliability of your electricity supply. Many farms live in remote areas and it is quite often we hear that you have experience of brownouts or even blackouts. Having a solar PV system with battery can definitely reduce your risk associated to electricity supply. I think that's all the items I wanted to cover on the solar PV system. Before I hand over back to Sarah, Chris. Mark, is there anything else you wanted to add on the different opportunities?

Mark Barber:

No. You've done a good job. Thanks, Remi. We've got a Q and A session coming up, so no doubt there'll be some questions.

Remi Cesaro:

All right. Thank you very much. So I will stop at this point.

Chris Blore:

Thanks, Remi. Thanks, Mark. Peter August, our producer from Gippsland, he's able to unmute himself and go through his experience with round one grants and maybe Peter, if you could just give us a quick overview of your system and what benefit you've got out of it to date and the process and maybe any tips for other producers that are listening in and to prepare themselves for an application.

Peter August:

Certainly. Okay. So thank you everybody. Sorry. I had a bit of a technical issue. Now we've got a 40 by 330 Watt solar panels and that's about 13 odd kilowatts of solar. We also have 48 kilowatts of battery storage capacity. And that's excellent in terms of the type of batteries that we've got. The type of batteries that we've got are lithium-ion batteries and you buy them in stacks of four. You can get less than four but generally the maximum is stack of four and we got three stacks of four because we're completely off the grid where we are. And from the audit that we had done, it showed that we could save in the 90% plus of diesel expenditure. But one thing that I do wish to note for all prospective applicants is to make sure your auditor delineates between business use and domestic use. That's very important. And yeah, that's really what I've got to say on the matter. I mean, if anybody has any questions, they quite welcome to ask. Hello?

Chris Blore:

Yep. We're here, but that's okay.

Peter August:

I thought I was having another technical issue there.

Chris Blore:

No, no, we're still here, so I might start, Peter, you said you were completely off the grid and you've got a solar and a battery backup or battery system. So what's the main things that that, obviously power in the house, but what are the main things around the farm in that business delineation?

Peter August:

Absolutely. So it powers some of the pumps, it powers the sheds, the fencing. Yeah. So that's mainly what gets powered and that's very important for us.

Chris Blore:

Excellent. Okay. Thank you for that, Peter. Well, the fact that you made it all the way through the system to actually get the grant means that it wasn't an overly onerous task and that you found it reasonable to apply and so forth.

Peter August:

Yeah, well, it was... I thank Peter Harrison because he was able to guide because I only found out about it two weeks before it closed last year. So, I was able to book and mobilize an auditor to get the application through within the nick of time. I just advise all prospective applicants to allow a little bit of an increase in price of a potential system from the time that you get the quote to the time that the grant is approved, because there is a bit of a lag time there. And it might've just been a COVID related increase. I don't know, if it was delays from imports, et cetera. That might not be the case now, but I certainly found that to be an issue.

Chris Blore:

Yeah. Excellent. Well, thank you for that, Peter. And with 15 minutes to go, I think we'll open it up to questions. Sarah, did we get any questions through the process, through any of the speakers?

Sarah Clack:

Yes, we do have a few questions come through. So our first question, which will be for Peter or Emily, just rolling through them. Here it is. So we've had a question saying that we're already off the grid. Would the energy assessment include this or is the grant only to reduce costs?

Peter Harrison:

Part of the assessment process is that the assessors will actually look at how you're set up at the moment and I've seen a number of assessments that have commented that say they've got a 50 kilowatt system on there. They'll actually review that, make sure it's the optimum system for you. We've had some where we've had recommendations to put on more solar panels or basically increase the capacity of it. Also looking at what's connected and if you're a dairy farmer and you're still trying to heat your water at night, then there's no point having solar panels, for instance. So making sure things are connected up where they should be, but really everything comes down to what's in the energy assessment report because we don't know what we don't know and what I will say is it's very, very unusual for an energy assessor to go on-farm and not find opportunities.

Chris Blore:

Thank you, Peter. While we've got Peter talking. We got a question from Mark. This might be interesting to a few people. How many quotes are required to support a grant application?

Peter Harrison:

Yeah, there's only one quote required. In the previous round we asked for two quotes for the tier one grants, but we've streamlined that a bit at the moment. What we encourage if possible and if you're comfortable, if you've got a local supplier, we are more than happy for you to go with your trusted local supplier. We don't base the quotes or the eligibility of the quote on who's the cheapest price we want you to find the best value for money.

Peter Harrison:

One of the questions in the application is about value for money. And why have you gone with that quote? And it's because it's your local supplier. Yeah, they do all the work on our farm. We trust them. They understand our systems. So there is a recommendation in the energy assessment reports about the expected costs but market forces suggest that that's going to vary. If you're in a remote part of the state, then it's going to cost you more to have things installed. But yeah, we only look for one. Sometimes we encourage you to seek a second opinion. We do some monitoring, particularly with solar. We've got a pretty good understanding of what the range of cents per kilowatts installed is and if we think it's a bit over the top then we do encourage you to get a second opinion.

Sarah Clack:

Fantastic. Thanks for that, Peter. We've had another question come through asking how long has this grant been open for?

Peter Harrison:

Well, this is the second program. The first program started in 2018 and closed in June of last year. This program opened for applications on the 1st of March. And as I've said before, it's a short and sharp program. We'll be closed to applications in December. The first program had $30 million, there's an additional $30 million in this program. So the total funding available over the life for both programs is $60 million. And Emily mentioned before we oversubscribed the first program, significantly oversubscribed it. So hence my encouragement to get in early.

Emily Witham:

Yeah. And applications for on-farm energy assessments close on the 15th of July, which is not too far away.

Chris Blore:

Just to clarify that point, Emily, I think you said earlier this morning that the application's close then the assessments don't have to be done by then. Is that correct?

Emily Witham:

Yeah, correct. So the applications to the on-farm energy assessment closes on the 15th of July, but we've got our grant applications open till the 15th of December. So there's time for you to have your on-farm energy assessment completed and then be able to apply for a grant.

Peter Harrison:

Yeah and I think just on the on-farm energy assessments, that is the first part of the process. And you can't go to grant unless you've got an energy assessment available. Now, if nothing else, I would encourage people to apply and have an on-farm energy assessment done now, it may come in and you may decide not to go ahead with anything. That's fine, but at least you've got a roadmap, if you like, of potential energy savings on your property that you might decide to implement over time. The on-farm energy assessments are at no cost to the farmer. So, you're not going to be out of pocket for it. You may lose a bit of time on it, but it's definitely a worthwhile process.

Mark Barber:

Yes. I think it's worth just trying, if I can just chime in and make the point that one of the benefits of having an assessment, it's not just about energy and operating costs. It's also about getting a clearer picture about the farm's carbon footprint. So, part of the data that's provided in our assessment is a carbon profile, associated with energy use and for farms that are interested in pursuing maybe a journey of reducing their overall carbon footprint, that can be very useful. And as you say, even if no changes is taken place immediately, it sets a bit of a benchmark, a starting point. But I do stress, that carbon footprint is around the energy consumption. Obviously the carbon emissions associated with use of fertilizer and land management and so on is a separate and also from animals that also is a separate category of emissions, but the energy footprint component is part of the scope of the assessment.

Chris Blore:

Thank you, Mark.

Peter August:

Just with regards to the energy footprint, the system that I have actually has an app that is on my phone and it actually tells you how many kilos of carbon emission have been avoided. But currently since I've had my system installed I've saved 931 kilos of carbon dioxide going into the atmosphere so that at least you can see it ongoing.

Sarah Clack:

That's pretty awesome there, Peter. Oh, Peter Harrison, were about to jump in and say something?

Peter Harrison:

Yeah, while people are thinking of perhaps wanting to get in the ute and check their stock, a couple of points just in regard to solar and I think Remi alluded to it. If you do go down the path of solar, you will be encouraged by the solar installer to put in larger systems. We have an allowance of 30% above the recommended size before we start looking at any amendments or pro rata adjustments to the grant funding because the grant funding is provided on a dollar for dollar basis up to the caps of 50,000 for tier one and 250,000 for tier two. So if it's a 50 kilowatt recommendation and they come up to a 60, it'll still go through okay because it's within that 30% threshold that we allow for it. And the other thing is, this is not a knockout type of grant.

Peter Harrison:

What we do is we work very closely with the farmers to try and get a project up and over the line. So if you don't tick every box, it's not like you get an email saying bad luck, you missed out. We declined very few applications through the first part of the program. And that's the approach we're taking is we actually want to help you guys get some cost relief and also some electricity or gas or diesel reduction on-farm. So it helps you, it helps the environment. It helps your viability. So we will work with you until we can get a result if we can.

Peter August:

And I can vouch for that folks, all the prospective applicants listening, I was helped throughout the whole process. And for that, I'm very grateful. Peter and his team were very, very helpful in helping me through the process and so we got it over the line and that was great. I mean, it was over $40,000 of grant that I got, that's a significant sum for me. And as I said for that, I'm very grateful.

Sarah Clack:

Thank you, Peter and Peter and yeah, I've had similar feedback from other farmers as well that Peter has been a fantastic help to them as well. I have had another question comes through here, would dairy farmers be eligible for this grant? And also if they have an existing solar system that's not performing as expected, would they be eligible to upgrade their solar system?

Peter Harrison:

Yes to both questions. If you are a farmer in Victoria, doesn't matter what area of farming, dairy, horticulture, broadacre farming, grazing, whatever, as long as you're a farmer in Victoria, you're eligible to apply. And we've seen a number where, we've actually had one where the solar system just wasn't working at all and yeah, we ended up funding the replacement of that system to a better one that actually provided some really great savings. So the answer is yes.

Sarah Clack:

Thank you.

Mark Barber:

One quick point, I'd like to make, if I can, Chris and that is for those interested in reviewing the performance of any existing pumps, whether they're water transfer pumps or pumps supplying irrigators, it's actually very helpful in the process of analyzing that pump to have a pressure gauge in-line installed. So that's something to consider if you are getting an assessment done and you are pumping water and you have not got pressure gauges on the suction side or the supply side of the pump, then that's something that's relatively easy to do and it provides a lot more insight into what duty that pump's performing, how it's operating compared to its design spec.