Chris Rieniets:

We farm approximately 340 acres here at Yinnar in Latrobe Valley, Victoria. It's a dairy operation. We milk up to 500 cows per annum, producing about three million litres of milk. Our operation consists of pasture-based farming, but predominantly our systems are milk harvesting, milk production, animal husbandry.

Chris Rieniets:

Operationally, we needed to do something to look at how we could improve our chiller system. By upgrading it, it saved us some money on energy costs. As a part of it, we've also included a heat recovery system and that's an additional saving to us. We identified that we could upgrade projects through the VEU, and that's where we instigated that.

Emma Jacobs:

The Victorian Energy Upgrades program is a key part of Victoria's energy sector emissions reduction pledge.

Ross Tunmer:

Essentially, incentivises businesses to implement energy efficiency projects. This is done by comparing greenhouse gas emissions before and after the implementation of the project. The amount you can get from the VEU program varies by project, but this can be quite significant, and it can range from anywhere between 10% to 100% of a project's total costs. To find out if your project is eligible, you can reach out to an accredited person.

Tomas Clarke:

The AP's role is to help the companies to comply with their regulations and the guidelines, and to help them to complete the process till the certification creation.

Chris Rieniets:

The Victorian Energy Upgrades program is a way of reducing energy costs through improved energy efficiency. The project, particularly with the chiller has saved us around 25% of our energy consumption. The savings in energy cost for the VEU program were around 15% of our cost of the upgrade. The additional savings from the water recovery were probably about another 5% to 6% in cost savings. Prior to implementing the project, we worked with our credited person to submit a project plan, which the Essential Services Commission reviews. And then once they give the okay, then we can proceed.

Chris Rieniets:

The VEU project hasn't really taken an enormous amount of time. Our accredited person, whom we were in contact with, did the majority of the work for us.

Arlen East:

Victorian energy efficiency certificates or VEECs are electronic certificates, which are rewarded for each tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent, which are reduced.

Ross Tunmer:

VEECs are generated through the process and sold to entities that are required to buy them under Victorian legislation, and the price of these VEECs varies with typical supply and demand forces.

Chris Rieniets:

A VEEC is a Victorian energy efficiency certificate, and those certificates are created, and then they can be sold. The projects will deliver an estimated to 200 VEEC, which is about 15% of our cost.

Ross Tunmer:

Measuring energy consumption and other production data is not only important for the VEU program but can also be important for internal operations. You can't manage what you're not measuring.

Tomas Clarke:

The data is used for creating the baseline and to create the energy profile of the farm.

Chris Rieniets:

I think understanding your energy costs on farm are critical to modern day farming. Being able to measure and articulate where energy is utilised and where savings opportunities can be gained is critical. It helps eliminate waste in your operations, and it helps you to identify potential savings.

Nick Tsaktsiras:

Agriculture Victoria's website will have plenty of information there for Victorian farmers about the VEU program. Ultimately, the VEU program will assist Victorian farmers to reduce their energy costs, help them fund technology upgrades on their properties and ultimately generate VEECs, which means more money in their pockets.

Chris Rieniets:

When it comes to the VEU process, the first step is to identify projects that reduce electricity or gas consumption. Personally, I quite like speaking to other farmers to see what projects they were familiar with, but you can also speak to an external expert.

Chris Rieniets:

Energy audits are another way to identify opportunities you may not be aware of. Examples of projects that could be implemented, include the replacement or upgrading of refrigeration systems, installation of VSDs on irrigation pumps, or installation of VSDs on vacuum pumps, and more.

Chris Rieniets:

After you identify the project you want to implement, the next step is to contact an accredited person. You can find an accredited person on the VEU registry website and by talking to the Essential Services Commission. The accredited person, also known as an AP, will ask for information about your proposed project and other baseline data such in my case, electrical interval data and daily milk volume data for the recent year. The AP will use this information to determine if your project is viable under the VEU program and give you an indication of how much money could be recouped through the process. Next, a scoping plan will be developed by the AP. This plan will be submitted to the Essential Services Commission for approval.

Chris Rieniets:

Some farmers think it's okay to start the project before pre-approval has been obtained, but unfortunately, it's not possible to retrospectively participate in the VEU program. So, it is extremely important that you wait until you have received approval before starting the project.

Chris Rieniets:

Once a project has been implemented, the AP will begin to collect data over the next 12 months and eventually submit an impact report to the ESC. Following all this, VEEC are created and then sold to earn revenue for the farmer. The last step in the VEU process is to nominate an account for the AP to deposit the income you earn from the sale of the VEECs. All in all, the process is relatively simple. As you will have the help of an accredited person to guide you through the journey as you seek to reduce your carbon footprint and recoup some of the costs of implementing new and more energy efficient processes.