

## Farmer “Reg-tech” smashes legal barriers at Ag Forum

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A major barrier to farmers setting up a business with other producers will be knocked down today with the launch of a free, online tool that they can use to register their business as a co-operative.

The “Co-op builder” is an online template for the legal documents required to set up a co-operative in Australia. It has been developed by the peak body for co-operatives, the Business Council of Co-operatives and Mutuals (BCCM) for the Farm Co-operatives and Collaboration Pilot Program (Farming Together), a federally funded, two-year pilot to enhance the expertise available to farmers wanting to establish agricultural co-operatives.

“Co-operatives are a proven, self-help option for farmers to run sustainable, locally owned and operated farm businesses and meet their shared goals, whether that’s better farm gate prices, cheaper inputs or better quality services,” said BCCM CEO Melina Morrison.

“The importance of a business model that offers farmers another way to stay on the land and keep control of their family farming businesses cannot be underestimated in this time of increasing farm ownership consolidation and competitive global markets.”

“Legal costs and lack of plain English information and guidance on setting up a co-operative in Australia has been one of the biggest barriers to establishing co-operatives according to the Senate inquiry into the sector that handed down its findings last year,” said Morrison.

“The online tool takes a “follow the bouncing ball” approach to demystify the co-op legal model and to debunk the idea that you need to spend a lot of money on legal advice to simply register a co-op business in the first place.”

The builder consists of a Constitution Builder to help prepare the rules for a commercial co-operative, and a Disclosure Statement Builder, which helps users prepare the co-op equivalent of a prospectus for potential members and investors.

Farmers will be able to access the builder for free on the Farming Together website [www.farmingtogether.com.au](http://www.farmingtogether.com.au) from today.

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**The Business Council of Co-operatives and Mutuals (BCCM)** is the national peak body representing Australian member-owned businesses in all sectors including agriculture, financial services, health insurance, retail, housing, motoring services and human services. With over 2000 co-operative and mutual organisations operating nationally representing a total of 29 million memberships, the BCCM highlights the contribution co-operatives and mutuals make to economic and social development in Australia. [www.bccm.coop](http://www.bccm.coop)