

Mitchell farmers, who opposed land use rules, expand influence.

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Protect our Farms members Phil Searle and Bill Chisholm. Picture supplied
A farm lobby group formed to fight restrictive planning controls in the Mitchell Shire is expanding to tackle what it says are broader challenges facing communities across north-central Victoria.

[Protect Our Farms](#) president Bill Chisholm said the group's past efforts to build awareness and unite landholders had laid a strong foundation for protecting farms and rural livelihoods into the future.

"Protect Our Farms has proven there is real strength when rural people come together with one voice," Mr Chisholm said.

"We started by pushing back against planning rules that threatened farming, and now we're broadening our focus to tackle the bigger issues that keep putting pressure on our farms, families and rural towns, such as the new [emergency services levy](#)."

He said the group intended to focus on four key areas - rural and pro-farmer policies from governments, practical emergency management, the environment and food security and stopping unfair cost shifting and red tape.

Protect our Farms member Phil Searle said the group wanted to make sure decision-makers at all levels of government heard from the people who knew rural life best.

Mr Searle, who runs sheep at Reedy Creek, said the group's primary focus would be the Emergency Services and Volunteer Fund.

The district encompasses the Central Goldfields, Mitchell, Mount Alexander and Murrindindi shires.

"We want to expand and take in the geographical area of the north-central total fire ban district," he said.

"Originally, we were focused on the Mitchell Shire, but we want to broaden our horizons and see if we can pick up many more new members."

Mr Searle said the group would approach both the opposition and the government to put forward its concerns.

"This tax is a big imposition and is intended to pay for things which were paid for out of consolidated revenue," he said.

"It's totally unfair, it's targeting the farming community particularly and is going to hit them hard.

"Protect Our Farms already had more than 100 members and continued to grow as more people stood up for the future of local farms and rural communities."

The group is inviting farmers, local businesses and rural residents to attend a community meeting on Thursday, August 21 at 7pm at Pyalong Recreation Hall to have their say on local priorities and help shape practical action plans and strategies.