

25 November 2009

Main Committee

Constituency Statement

Mamre Project

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay) (9.45am) —I rise to recognise the important work being done by the Sisters of Mercy at the Mamre Project in St Marys. Based at the historic Mamre Homestead, the Mamre Project is an innovative combination of social enterprise, tourism and training that has, over the years, provided support to thousands of people in Western Sydney. Mamre Homestead was built in the early 1820s by the colonial settler the Reverend Samuel Marsden. It became a model farm, providing fruit, wheat and wool for the young colony. In 1984 Mamre Homestead was leased to the Sisters of Mercy, who established Mamre Plains Ltd, a not-for-profit organisation. Their vision for the site was to create opportunities for training and education for people in Western Sydney, embracing the notion of new beginnings that first inspired the creation of Mamre Homestead during colonial times.

Often the people participating in one of the training programs at Mamre enter the homestead in real need of support and at risk of becoming isolated from the community, but they leave as more confident individuals who have developed important work and life skills. Mamre is run on a principle of providing support for people while boosting their self-esteem by equipping them with the skills they need to enter or re-enter the workforce and overcome disadvantage. Mamre focuses on assisting young people and people with disabilities. It offers programs for students in years 8 and 9 who are at risk of not completing year 10 and a supported employment service that gives people with disabilities an opportunity to work at the on-site nursery and maintain the homestead grounds.

Mamre also operates as a registered training organisation, training more than 8,000 people in IT since 1985 and offering workplace based hospitality training through its restaurant and function centre. I recently met with some of the Sudanese families who participate in the humanitarian refugee training program at Mamre. I am proud to say that the Rudd government has provided funding for one of these programs and it provides the families with an opportunity to develop business skills and work in a market garden that provides produce to local farmers markets, so that they are working and earning money to support themselves and to contribute to the community.

I was also honoured to have been a guest at the inaugural 100-Mile Dinner at Mamre, which was part of the Sydney International Food Festival. It sourced all the food, wine and beverages from within a 100-mile radius, to encourage people to use local produce and reduce their carbon footprint. Much of it was sourced from the produce grown by the Sudanese farmers. I was joined at this event by the Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs and Settlement Services, and the event was hosted by television gardener Costa Georgiadis. The event was an outstanding success.

I would like to acknowledge the driving forces behind Mamre, namely the chief executive officer, Sister Mary-Louise Petro; the general manager, Bob Thatcher; Sister Joyce Vella; Sister Janet Woods, who arranged for a group of Sudanese families to meet me in Parliament House earlier this year; and all of the volunteers and staff at the Mamre Project.