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WEST BUSINESS

Meet the man behind the great Chinese takeaway

■ **Brad Thompson**



The mastermind behind China's buy-up of WA farmland as part of plans to create a direct supply chain to its hungry masses has broken his silence about the deal he pulled together while fighting for his life.

Will Crozier brokered what has the potential to be one of the most significant deals in Australia's agricultural history from an office in Geelong as an aggressive cancer ripped through his body.

Mr Crozier, 49, spoke exclusively to *WestBusiness* about the deal to buy vast tracts of prime land in WA's south, including three sprawling farms from prominent families, and set up new export facilities to ship grain direct to China.

The investment, worth hundreds of millions of dollars, has been made by China's biggest agricultural conglomerate, the state-owned Beidahuang Group.

Mr Crozier said that while some were spooked by the Chinese, it would be the best thing for agriculture in Australia in almost 40 years. He revealed:

- The deal would clear the way for WA farmers to export millions of tonnes of grain a year to China.
- The WA Government had fully supported Beidahuang's plans from the time the project was launched four years ago.
- An arm of Beidahuang operating as a publicly listed company could soon own or lease 100,000ha of WA farmland and had not ruled out buying more farms.
- The Chinese had paid inflated prices for farms because they were honouring handshake deals made

before the market dropped.

- The deal was structured to avoid breaching Foreign Investment Review Board regulations even if they were made more stringent.

Mr Crozier said about \$150 million had already been invested in the supply chain project, including \$70.5 million on farm purchases in the past six months.

"This is real money coming in and hopefully we get it right and there will be a lot more investment to follow," he said.

An initial \$10 million upgrade of storage and loading infrastructure at Albany Port will allow shipment of up to 300,000 tonnes a year in the first two years, from this summer.

This is set to be followed by a massive investment at the port while rail investment is being considered in the long term. Mr Crozier vowed that his private company Vicstock Grain would create a port facility "second to none" after buying a long-term lease from woodchip company Plantation Energy.

"We will sit down with the port authority to talk

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Vicstock Grain's Will Crozier

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