



'AGRICULTURE EDUCATION'

Committee Secretary
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

10th February 2012

Dear Committee

RE: Senate Inquiry: Higher education and skills training to support future demand in agriculture and agribusiness in Australia

'Agriculture Education' was established in 2007 and designed to encourage and support the delivery of agricultural education within Australian schools and childcare centres. Since our inception, 'Agriculture Education' has focused on the development of high quality, innovative and engaging learning programs. The core philosophy of 'Agriculture Education' is to interest students in agriculture and address misconceptions students have about the industry. In addition 'Agriculture Education' is aiming to promote study in tertiary Agriculture.

We comprise of a team of teachers who have an interest in the area of agriculture and who have worked extensively with industry and cross curriculum educators to develop resources for teachers that are current to industry and syllabus/curriculum standards.

Through our work, 'Agriculture Education' has become a driving force in promoting the involvement of industry in education and Vocational Education and Training within the school context. We believe through our experience in consultation with industry on the topic of agricultural education and work in the classroom we have developed expertise which may help the senate in their enquiry into agricultural education.

Specifically, in terms of reference to the inquiry we would ask the senate to consider the following relating to:

- the adequacy of funding and priority given by governments at the federal, state and territory level to agriculture and agribusiness higher education and vocational education and training;
- solutions to address the widening gap between skilled agricultural labour supply and demand;
- the incorporation of animal welfare principles in agriculture education



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The adequacy of funding and priority given by governments at the federal, state and territory level to agriculture and agribusiness higher education and vocational education and training;

Since 2007 Agriculture Education has attempted to fill a void by supplying agricultural educators (who are providing vocational education and training within the school context) teaching and curriculum resource material which meets the requirements of the relevant syllabus and curriculum documents for Agriculture and Vocational Education based subjects. During this time 'Agriculture Education' has approached various levels of government for assistance to help with the creation of resources for schools as well as other agricultural education projects.

To date our operation has failed to attain any funding from any level of government despite the assistance provided by local Members of Parliament.

At the federal level, discussions with policy advisors from the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries have regularly supported the view that the department believes that the industry must "provide self-help" before DAFF is willing to provide assistance. Unfortunately industry has proven not to be of the same view and typically believed that government must lead the way forward in this area.

Correspondence with The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations has reported that due to the variations in the delivery of agriculture throughout the country that any developments should be done in consultation with state governments and school education remains the domain of the states.

Given that our work is tailored to a very specific aspect of agricultural education for the current time, (that is curriculum support), we recognise that greater issues will require attention. However, it is also the belief of 'Agriculture Education' that the economic market place for the development of agricultural education material is too small to be left to the principle of supply and demand. Work in the area is not possible without sponsorship or subsidies. We ask the senate enquiry to consider not just the delivery of agricultural education but what resources are used and how the government expects these resources to be produced into the future.

Solutions to address the widening gap between skilled agricultural labour supply and demand;

There is a plethora of research which has been matched by our experience which illustrates interest in tertiary studies is best fostered and developed when students are developing their independence and career interests during adolescence. We are also noticing that a number of issues are limiting the involvement of this age group in agricultural study thus resulting in excluding agriculture as a career choice. Some of these issues include:

- Students are not engaged with the curriculum as Industry and government are happy to see resources designed for use in primary schools to become a significant resource used in high schools.



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- Very few of the resources created for use in schools have any relevance to education systems syllabus and thus is not useful in schools.
- Anecdotal evidence reports that Career advisors actively discourage students from undertaking studies in Agriculture
- A number of schools have reduced or removed agriculture from their campus as the course is too expensive to run or attract trained Primary Industry trained teachers.
- Principals are generally poorly educated in the area of agriculture and only see agriculture for people who want to be a farmer. They see no other career opportunities for their students. This limits access of organisations to promote agriculture.

'Agriculture Education' has undertaken research to identify remedies to address these concerns. We have developed strategies to improve participation rates in agriculture and involve students in their study. However 'Agricultural Education' is of the view that the major issue which affects the delivery of the programs is lack of willingness for industry, government and other stakeholder groups to support trained and experience educators to take a lead role in the promotion agriculture to school students. Given that agribusiness and agriculture is reliant upon our educators interest promote careers in agriculture, we feel that there needs to be more work to support professional educators.

The incorporation of animal welfare principles in agriculture education

Issues with Animal Welfare in Agricultural Education

Animals in educational facilities can become subject to significant harm by adolescents. Indeed within one educational facility 'Agriculture Education' witnessed significant death and torture of a significant number of large and small animals as a result of student misconduct.

As the normal course of action with these matters, this triggers reporting to child welfare agencies and the students being reported to the police, charged and prosecuted. Of concern is that when these matters arise, and in terms of policy implementation of animal welfare, we are concerned that at the current time we are unaware of any authority monitoring the deaths of animals used in education facilities (deaths of any purpose or cause), let alone auditing of animal welfare. Today there is no way to identify the true number of instances of animal cruelty within schools, how significant the problem is, or what impact does this have on society.

Animal Welfare within the Curriculum

Animal Welfare is able to be incorporated in the development of all Agricultural Education programs by 'Agriculture Education'. Following discussions with leading animal welfare associations, we have taken the view to structure our programs to foster students to question the animal handling practices and the impact on animal welfare. We also encourage students to evaluate the animal husbandries practices, their alternatives and consider their role in today's society. 'Agriculture Education' feels that animal welfare can (and must) be provided for in schools through the curriculum.

Greg Adamson