



**Submission to the Senate Education,
Employment and Workplace Relations Committee
Inquiry into all aspects of higher education and
skills training to support future demand in
agriculture and agribusiness in**

BACKGROUND

The Australian Beef Industry Foundation (ABIF) is a not for profit organization dedicated to providing tertiary education and training for young people to prepare them for careers in the beef and associated industries.

ABIF has a vision of attracting, educating and retaining young people in all aspects of the supply chain to create a smarter, more profitable and sustainable Australian beef industry, and has developed a mission to be recognised as the best provider of pathways to beef industry careers through scholarships and other programs.

Australian beef is celebrated worldwide for its high quality and commands a price premium from consumers. Currently however, beef producers at the beginning of the supply chain are excluded from commanding these price premiums. Not only is this causing an exodus of people and therefore key skills, it is also not attracting and retaining people in the industry – this is a serious crisis.

ABIF is committed to investing in young people, education and information to arrest this crisis and develop a beef industry that is highly profitable, sustainable and supportive of rural communities and their needs. ABIF is a stable, independent and innovative organization that is growing rapidly through strong relationships with industry supporters and investors.

ABIF provides future-looking career paths for people in the beef industry through leadership, inclusiveness and integrity – essentially we are a “one-stop-shop” for beef industry career information and assistance.

We target the next generation of beef producers through education and training that is focused on efficiency and competitiveness leading to financially rewarding and successful careers.

By developing business skills along the beef supply chain we will ensure that young Australian beef producers flourish and are taught to continually strive for high standards in quality and efficiency.

We fund beef industry training, education, research and practical learning opportunities through national and international scholarships and work experience.

ABIF's investment in young people since 1980 has produced outstanding results with many of its alumni becoming leaders in their fields.

The programs and scholarships ABIF offers are made possible by the loyal support of a wide range of investors.

The scholarships provided by ABIF include:-

- Sending two young people to United States Universities annually
- Leadership courses to Marcus Oldham College, Victoria. This scholarship includes a special component for indigenous students.
- Leadership courses at Lincoln College, Christchurch, New Zealand
- Participation in appropriate study tours
- Provision of work experience opportunities

In addition we are developing further opportunities at Universities in UK and South America.

ABIF is administered by a Board of Directors elected by the donors to the Foundation. Further information is available at www.abif.com.au

SUBMISSION

1. 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.

There is undoubtedly a funding shortfall at all levels for agricultural education and training.

In the tertiary sector this is exemplified by the lack of relief from HECS charges for students in this sector studying at regional institutions.

We assert that some funding is not well prioritised with high percentages of available funds being directed to administration and not for the direct benefit of students.

Recommendation

We strongly support the proposal to:-

- Provide "HECS" relief for students studying at regional universities needs to be provided as well as providing the youth allowance/living away from home allowance for any student attending a regional campus
- Provide "HECS" relief for agricultural/agribusiness/horticultural graduates working in regional areas (for say 5 years or more) should be a national priority
- Make Apprenticeship /Certificate/Diploma Schemes a high priority – Increase number and quality.

2. The reasons and impacts of the decline in agricultural and related educational facilities

We submit that there is a gap in the education system for agriculture: primarily, that students leave tertiary agricultural institutions with little or no work experience in the industry which has negative implications for the efficiency and success of agriculture both in policy making and in practice.

Further, there is a need to incorporate the study of Agriculture into primary and secondary curriculums to encourage school leavers to pursue agriculture as a career.

By integrating agriculture into subjects at the primary and secondary levels, particularly while we are in the early stages of the introduction of the Australian Curriculum, students will be better informed about the role of agriculture and perhaps be more inclined to consider this as a career path.

Recommendation

That organisations such as the Primary Industry Education Fund and ABIF be financially supported to assist with administrative costs to enable all the funding attracted from industry to be allocated to the objectives of these organisations.

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

Research has shown that to interest children in agriculture it must begin at primary school. To this end, we support the Primary Industries Education Foundation and the DPI Landlearn Program.

One of the fundamental differences between agriculture and most other professions is that students of the tertiary agricultural schools in Australia graduate without any industry experience unless they are children from rural enterprises.

The exception to this is Marcus Oldham College, Geelong, Victoria. Marcus Oldham is based on the model of Lincoln University in New Zealand which incorporates work experience into their program prior to graduation.

As one graduate from Melbourne recently told said "If I hadn't come off a dairy farm I would be making policy decisions in the Department of Primary Industries without even knowing how a cow was milked".

Australia has a major deficiency in that its' tertiary agricultural institutions provide limited contact with the heads of agricultural industry and farming in particular. This contrasts with both the USA and New Zealand.

While the academic side is one issue and of course structures are for others to comment on, we argue that having work experience should be an essential part of all tertiary courses, including Veterinary Science.

By having to work in the industry it not only gives the student hands on experience but provides a practical context for knowledge.

The introduction of the national curriculum framework in 2012 into primary and secondary school provides an opportunity for agriculture to be integrated into this new curriculum. Agriculture can be successfully integrated into the study of science, environmental science, history, politics, mathematics, English, and general inquiry units.

One way of implementing this is to develop specific lesson plans with an agricultural focus for specific subject domains that meet required learning objectives, that teacher's can use as resources.

Mansfield Secondary College has recently developed a program called Agri-business for year 9 and 10 students to address local agricultural employment shortages and as a way to engage students in their schooling. By providing a relevant and practical learning program. This is a highly successful model that builds on partnerships between the school, the community and local agricultural enterprises.

Recommendation

The importance of networking cannot be underestimated. By sending students out into as many sectors as possible, students provide a source of skilled labour and also act as ambassadors for their University.

This in turn serves to bring other young people into contact with University students and can help contribute to the declining numbers of tertiary students taking up Agricultural Science.

Further, students begin to develop their own networks of relevant stakeholders which will enhance their success once working in agriculture.

4. The impacts of any shortage on agricultural research;

Food security is not necessarily a current problem for Australia; however as the population increases there will be a continuing need to improve our agricultural production to maintain our supply base for both our domestic and export industries.

The lack of places in Universities for Agricultural Science students will, and is resulting in insufficient graduates becoming available for research institutions with a consequent diminution in agricultural research.

Recommendation

That additional places be made available in Universities science faculties for the teaching of Agricultural Science.

5. The economic impacts of labour shortages on Australia's export oriented agricultural industries;

The mining boom in Australia will not last forever and we need, as a nation to continue to provide support to areas where we have a natural advantage. Our agricultural production is one of those areas.

For Australia to enjoy the high standard of living that is now substantially based on imports we must continue to exploit our natural advantages by maintaining and growing our agricultural exports.

Current labour shortages are already impacting on agricultural exports and this trend must be reversed.

Recommendation

That renewed emphasis be placed on expanding Agricultural exports through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Austrade and other export agencies.

6. The incorporation of animal welfare principles in agriculture education;

We support the inclusion of animal welfare principals in agriculture education provided those principles involve stress free animal handling, nutrition and animal health.

7. Any other matters

Perception

To attract young people to farming and the broader agricultural sector there is, we believe, a need to change perceptions.

As Professor Bill Malcolm said at the Young Agribusiness Leaders Summit which ABIF helped sponsor in August 2010, 20% of the farmers are cooking on gas, 60% are sitting there and 20% are going bankrupt and the focus is misguidedly on the latter sector.

The reality is that the quality of the young people in agriculture is not showcased.

To this end, ABIF has initiated the start of a Young Farmers Contest that is intended to be similar to the New Zealand Young Farmers Contest.

To establish the contest and to raise sponsorship funds will take much time and effort and will require assistance with funding for administration .

There is an urgent need for a foundation to support young people, innovation and research in agribusiness.

Two models stand out and these reinforce the urgent need for government funding to help grow the Australian Beef Industry Foundation.

Firstly, there is the Gardiner Foundation established with bi-partisan support to enhance Victoria's dairy industry. This is a great example of what can be done but it is Victorian only and dairy specific.

The second example is the New Zealand AGMARDT Foundation which is more broadly based.

These two foundations, both of which are independently run but developed out of government initiatives are what we believe the Australian Beef Industry Foundation needs to grow into with bi-partisan state and federal government support.

We need to attract people to all sectors of the agricultural supply chain and we need young people with academic qualifications and hands-on skills. It is disturbing that 25% of the Australian community has tertiary qualifications, yet in the agriculture sector it is only about 7%.

After China and the mining industry have dug a big hole in Australia – what will be left? – Agriculture.

Practical agriculture needs people with both practical skills and tertiary education. It is the role of this committee to lift the aspirations of young people toward working in food and fibre.

Today a farmer needs to have accounting, marketing, soil management, genetics and many other areas of tertiary training in order to compete with ever contracting terms of trade in Australian agriculture.

No longer can career advisers direct only the brightest and best of year 10 students into law and medicine.

They must not restrict farming to those who for various reasons are not academically gifted.

The status of farming needs elevation to the point where students seek it out as a real career option and if intrinsically motivated toward farming are guided to follow this path to a rewarding and self-fulfilling life in the bush or in many of the other parts of the supply chain that put food on our table and clothes on our back.

Mining in Australia employ 85,000 people. Agribusiness employs 365,000. Australia is gifted with abundant resources.

We trust that your committee supports, and recommends, programs to lift the aspirations of the nation toward farming, and support the Australian Beef Industry Foundation model to provide tools to 18 to 30-year olds to realize their potential in contributing to the future growth of agribusiness in Australia.

Australian Beef Industry Foundation

1st December 2011