



Farm Machinery Dealers Association of WA



WA Regional Manufacturers (Inc)

Friday, 4 November 2011

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

Dear Committee Members,

Re. Senate Enquiry: **"Higher education and skills training to support future demand in agriculture and agribusiness in Australia"**.

This very welcome initiative comes at a time when we, along with other concerned industry representative bodies, have begun to despair at the ever declining educational resources which remain to support our industry into the future.

It seems that while a good number of universities retain courses for students wishing to pursue tertiary studies in Agricultural Science, Agricultural Economics and the like, we know of none which offer higher learning in the all-important area of agricultural mechanisation.

We are at a loss to understand why there is so little recognition of the need for engineering and design expertise to support the increasing reliance on the various forms of machinery and electronic systems which farmers must employ if they are to efficiently and competitively manage the economies of scale they have been forced into accepting in order to remain viable.

There is a desperate shortage of agricultural engineers throughout Australia and our industry suffers many lost opportunities as a result, not helped by imports which are often less suited to our conditions but which can take advantage of their relatively lower price while the value of our dollar remains at current levels. It is also becoming increasingly difficult to hold those engineers currently engaged in agriculture against the offers of significantly higher remuneration from the mining sector which has just as much demand for the relatively few engineers available in the market.

With the U.N.'s Food and Agriculture Organisation (F.A.O.) calling for the world to lift food production a further 70% by the year 2050 in order to meet demand from an expected global population of 9.3 Billion at that time, it is hard to see how we can expect to even sustain our agricultural sector at current levels, let alone play our part in meeting the F.A.O.'s challenge unless we can grow all parts of our sector in a coordinated way.

We therefore relish the opportunity to submit the accompanying 2-page "call for help" as a start to this very necessary review of our future educational and training needs and we stand ready to assist in any way we are able in response to your further enquiries of us.

Alan Fisher

President

  
John Henchy

Executive Officer

Higher education and skills training to support future demand in Agriculture and Agribusiness in Australia.

- The Farm Machinery Dealers Association of WA (Inc) (FMDA) and Western Australia Regional Manufacturers (Inc) (WARM) are just two Associations who, like many Agribusinesses, are concerned at the lack of focus on Agricultural education and the resultant scarcity of suitably qualified employees for our industry.
- Our members comprise Farm Machinery Dealers, Manufacturers for Regional Markets, Farm Machinery Importers and allied industries.
- The majority of our members are regionally based and in many instances are the largest employers in the area.
- The Farm Mechanisation industry, many would agree, has had a bigger influence on Agriculture and Horticulture than any other aspect in helping Primary Producers to improve efficiency, productivity and to reduce input costs. Additionally, if it were not for mechanisation, Australian agriculture in today's competitive world would clearly cease to be viable and yet this industry is being deprived of well-trained employees with a suitable agricultural background.
- It is therefore all the more alarming that there is not one tertiary institution in Western Australia, along with a dire scarcity nationally, which has farm mechanisation included in its syllabus. A student graduating with an Agribusiness or Agricultural Science Degree now has no formal education in an important area which can make or break a farming business.
- The Agricultural Colleges within Western Australia provide a valuable service to those choosing Agriculture as a career path but the question remains as to where they move onto when seeking tertiary studies and qualifications in their chosen disciplines and this is particularly relevant to our Industry.
- Agriculture is a huge industry, world wide, and with the world population estimated to reach 9 billion people by 2050 it is going to require considerably more resources if we are to play our part in feeding the world and an absolutely essential resource will be suitably educated people with a broad knowledge of Agriculture.
- These views touch only upon the needs of the scantily resourced farm mechanisation aspect and the case becomes ever more

compelling when the many other complementary disciplines involved in Agricultural industry are given equal attention to their needs.

- Regrettably when young people speak of a career in Agriculture, many see life on the farm as the only option whereas the Agricultural industry is so much broader than this and offers a career path probably larger than any other industry in the world.
- Agriculture (and Horticulture) is a multidisciplinary industry characterised by generally large distances from major population centres. It therefore, unfortunately, receives relatively little press and suffers a low profile at Government level despite its importance to all of us. This malaise flows down to parents and students and, as a result, the sector is often overlooked as a career path for young people within an interesting, challenging, but very rewarding industry.
- We can only speak for Western Australia but Governments, Federal and State, now have a uniquely defined opportunity to provide for and answer the need to satisfy a pent up demand for appropriately educated students and practitioners within this fundamentally important food-producing industry, here and overseas, and the question remains as to whether that opportunity and vision will be realised.....the failure to do so will exact a price which all will have to bear because our wealth of minerals, although important in economic terms, remains inedible.