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8 November 2011

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

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Dear Sir / Madam

**Higher education and skills training to support future demand in agriculture and agribusiness in Australia.**

Currently in the South Australian Parliament, the Economic and Finance Committee is holding an Inquiry into Workforce and Education Participation.

The South Australian Farmers Federation has made a submission to this Inquiry.

As the South Australian Inquiry is somewhat similar to the Senate Inquiry into meeting the education and skills requirements for the agriculture sector, I am attaching a copy of the South Australian Farmers Federation submission.

Yours sincerely

**Carol Vincent**  
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

Attach.

# Submission by The



*In response to*

## **Economic & Finance Committee of the Parliament of South Australia**

### **Inquiry into Workforce and Education Participation**

*(November 2011)*

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## **Introduction**

The South Australian Farmers Federation (SAFF) is South Australia's peak agricultural organisation representing farmers across South Australia. As an agri-political group, SAFF's aim is to assist South Australian farmers and their rural communities achieve sustainable profitability by providing representation, leadership and services to members.

By lobbying governments, SAFF has been able to achieve changes in legislation that promotes farming interests and the rural communities where they live and work. SAFF works to generate greater understanding and awareness of farming's role, contribution and value to the South Australian economy. It also works to ensure that our farming communities continue to play a key role in the development and sustainability of our state as well as their own livelihoods.

South Australia's rural sector earned almost \$5 billion in exports during 2010/2011. Agriculture in South Australia includes the production of beef, sheep, lamb and chicken meat, chicken eggs and crops such as barley, oats and wheat. There are currently almost 12,000 farming families and 33,000 people employed in farm jobs in South Australia.

The agri-food industry currently contributes \$12.4 billion to the state's economy each year – and accounts for 146,000 South Australian jobs. The majority of South Australian food industry businesses are small to medium operators.

## **Inquiry into Workforce and Education Participation**

SAFF appreciates the opportunity to make a submission to this Inquiry by the Economic and Finance Committee of the Parliament of South Australia.

SAFF's interest is obviously in both the State's agriculture and rural sectors, and each of these is discussed.

Also addressed in this submission, are some of the issues surrounding training for farmers.

It is noted that the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee is also currently examining higher education and skills training to support future demand in agriculture and agribusiness in Australia. While this is more specific than the Inquiry by the South Australian Economic and Finance Committee, there would be benefits in both Committees liaising if this is appropriate.

## Agriculture

- Agriculture has to compete with mining for employees.
- Because agriculture is usually talked down, it regrettably and unjustifiably has a poor image. As a result it is difficult to attract people to work in the sector, even though there is generally a shortage of people for both skilled and unskilled positions. Skilled positions can range from agronomists, veterinary surgeons and consultants to shearers, wool classers and mechanics. Unskilled include farm labourers and casuals – though it must be noted that there are now strict OHS rules and other regulations that mean training and licences are required to handle farm machinery, heavy vehicles, farm chemicals, etc.
- Limited range of courses in South Australia for gaining skills. Studying Agricultural Science at the University of Adelaide is not appropriate for all who want to become farmers and farm managers, but this has replaced the courses at the previous Roseworthy Agricultural College. One of the alternatives is TAFE courses, but these have lost much of their credibility and are nowadays not always offered.

## **Rural South Australia**

- Rural South Australia suffers in relation to most other States as there is no recognised rural university or rural tertiary studies in this State.
- Difficulties in travelling to Adelaide for education, training and employment and the related cost of finding accommodation in the city for rural students, apprentices and others trying to upgrade or obtain new skills.
- Difficulties in attracting people to work and live in rural areas.
- Continual reductions in State Government services in regional areas (not only PIRSA offices, but closures or less staff for police stations, area schools, country hospitals, etc), leads to less commercial services also being provided and a decline in the local community.
- Proposed changes to the conditions surrounding drivers licences (such as not being able to obtain a provisional licence to 18 meaning all drivers under 18 cannot drive solo, and provisional drivers being restricted on how many passengers they can have and from driving at night) will further limit young rural people's opportunities to gain employment and training.

## Training for farmers

There is an issue with cost/ funding for farmers undertaking training. For a student to get value from a course there needs to be interaction with others who may ask questions which others have not thought of (through different experiences). This necessitates the attendance at workshops.

### Impediments to participation in education, training and employment include;

- Travel distance.

It is not uncommon for students to be expected to travel for two hours or more for an eight hour workshop. This is the result of funding cuts particularly to TAFE which has seen a reduction in the number of venues at which courses are held, and a subsequent reduction in staff to facilitate workshops and training.

- Cost of travel.

The re-imbursment of travel expenses (where applicable) which traditionally have always been low, has increased only marginally in the past decade or more. Presently the rates are 12 cents per kilometre after the first 200 hundred kilometres and \$25 per night for accommodation costs. There are other conditions which also apply.

- The need to maximise income through off farm employment

As the average annual farming income has decreased, and expenses have increased, younger people in particular are taking on jobs in other industries to supplement their income. This then has the effect of making it difficult to program time to attend training related to the farming industry, which then suffers from that lack of training in newer farming methodologies.

In addition to the above, the following points are relevant;

1. As a further deterrent to the conducting of workshops, there is an assumption that rural students are able to access the internet at the same rate as those in municipal or urban areas so there is an expectation that most training can be done "on-line". It must be remembered that access to the network is unreliable in many areas because of the infra-structure. Additionally most families have only one computer which is subject to high demand because it is the main business computer, is used during the day for many of the accounting / book keeping activities; is used by the farm owner to access information of an evening, and it may be required by others for other study. The use of on-line learning has the additional

detrimental effect of further isolating rural students who would otherwise form strong relationships and networks with others studying the same disciplines.

2. There is a reliance on private providers to pick up training short falls in the rural regions. However, the reality is that those organisations will be involved in those areas which show a financial profit and will disregard those areas less profitable.
3. There is an increased use of industry inexperienced, but academically qualified, presenters and facilitators of workshops. This results in students not being extended in their learning, so making the time away from the workplace and the distance travelled more of a burden.
4. There is the need to understand that education and training is lifelong and generally must be considered a pathway for opportunities. As part of this, education and training opportunities must be user-friendly. Use of terminology, complicated jargon and not being familiar with modern learning environments easily scares many from even wanting to try further training or education. There needs to be a course that teaches that without learning and development non-participants may be relegated to lower paying or basic employment. Workplace learning with appropriate certificates of participation may sow the seed of ambition to take learning to the next step.
5. Nowadays with the increasing number of strict OHS rules and other regulations, farmers, farm workers and those wanting to become farm workers are required to complete various training courses and obtain licences for a range of activities including handling farm machinery, heavy vehicles, farm chemicals, etc. And yet there is only a limited number of training organisations and venues (often in Adelaide) where the appropriate training and licences can be undertaken. This is an added cost not only to running a farm business, but for anyone who would be prepared to become a farm worker.

### Business skills

Being a farmer must now mean more than growing crops and managing livestock. As farm size has increased, farmers are now in control of businesses with considerable assets (mainly land) and usually with both high returns but high expenses. To be profitable, farmers need considerable business skills.

While many younger farmers have spent time away from their family farms and have gained a trade or other skills, they are lacking in business skills. And yet there are very limited numbers of courses that are currently available.



## TAFE on Farm Training Scheme

A very worthwhile program particularly for young farmers was the TAFE on Farm Training Scheme. This started in its present form in the late 1970's. (See Attachment 1 for details on the Scheme.)

Unfortunately the numbers doing the on-farm training have been declining. There used to be groups of up to 30, but now down to groups of seven (though age of students is increasing). TAFE need help in promoting the Scheme. Not only is the mining industry a competitor, but potential city students are not made aware of the On Farm Training Scheme.

The Scheme is now linked to school-based training apparently as TAFE supports the link with schools as it provides a source of funding. It is unfortunate that due to the need to attract funding, the Scheme in effect has been diluted to fit in with school requirements and has lost much of its leading edge credibility. This has been unfair to those relatively new in farming.

The Scheme was also changed in 1999 from a total course to a series of packages, and this has also been more restrictive.

## Government assistance

During the drought years from 2006 to 2011, the State Government had a very effective drought package worth \$115 million. Of the 45 projects, this included:

- business planning grants (1,568 businesses benefited),
- drought apprenticeship retention scheme (980 apprentices supported to remain in the regions),
- labour market transition (742 farmers learnt new transferable skills), and
- computers and training for drought affected primary producers (224 primary producers received training).

[SOURCE *State Drought Response* PIRSA June 2011 109 pages]

Because of the difficulties in obtaining training in rural areas, there should be consideration to whether there would be benefits in reintroducing some of these projects. For example, under the drought apprenticeship retention scheme, there was a retainment allowance of \$1,500 paid to the employer for each apprentice/trainee retained. If such a scheme was reintroduced, it would be a small but significant initiative to encourage apprenticeship in rural South Australia.

## Conclusion

Workforce and education participation is a continuing, major issue for South Australia's agriculture where the financial incentive for young people to enter the agriculture sector rather than the mining industry has made it difficult to attract young skilled people into agriculture. There has been plenty of negative press that has hampered the enthusiasm for people to want their children to have a life in agriculture. In many instances, careers in agriculture and associated activities are not even considered. This lack of uptake and understanding of the agricultural industry is of vital concern to farmers and the future of farming.

The South Australian Farmers Federation supports the gaining of skills and having quality education and training, for people who wish to work in agriculture. It is essential for South Australia's future prosperity that skilled people work within agriculture and have access to the latest development in their technical and business operations.

At a recent national conference at Flinders University on *Rural Futures Matter: A sustainable Australia*, Professor Graeme Hugo described agriculture as "*the industry of the future.*" While he was referring particularly to food security, for agriculture to continue to develop in this State there is an urgent need to attract and retain people, particularly young people, to work in both agriculture and rural South Australia.

### TAFE SA

### Certificate III in Agriculture

The On-Farm Training scheme was instigated in the late 1970's as a means of formalizing the education and training of farm employees and so creating a career path. Then, as now, the scheme is industry driven and it is estimated that more than 90% of young farmers have participated in the scheme across the state. Since the inception of this valuable course TAFE SA has been, and still is the pre-eminent provider of training.

#### Level: Certificate III

Level III qualifications are developed by industry for industry. Extensive consultation between National Training Advisory Bodies and other recognised bodies ensures the training packages, which form the basis of this qualification, are valid, relevant, and usable.

A participant in this qualification will normally be engaged in a workplace in which they;

- demonstrate some theoretical knowledge,
- apply a range of well-developed skills,
- apply known solutions to a variety of predictable problems,
- perform processes that require a range of well-developed skills where some, discretion and judgement is required,
- interpret available information using discretion and judgement,
- take responsibility for their own outputs in work and learning,
- take limited responsibility for the output of others.

#### To take part

- A participant who meets the criteria may enrol as a Trainee.
- This is formalised by the bi-lateral signing of Contracts of Training by the employer and employee and affirms the Trainee would receive training at all times when on the job.
- Trainees who are *employed fulltime are regarded as fulltime students* during the period of their training.
- This type of enrolment attracts Commonwealth funding, is known as **User Choice**, and is subject to more stringent conditions than other funding sources.
- The Trainee is expected to make themselves available for periodic on job assessment as arranged.
- Additionally the Trainee is expected to attend an agreed number of Off-Farm training days (approximately 25 per year), presented or convened by TAFE SA. (See attachment A for a typical list of workshops as presented in this course. List is not definitive)

- To determine eligibility for a Traineeship Trainers need to contact an Australian Apprenticeship Centre (AAC).
- *Other types of enrolment can apply*

**Progress through** training is monitored by TAFE SA, in collaboration with the Trainer, matching the trainee's progress by means of a log book, thus ensuring compliance with the requirements and standards of the AQTF.

The standards and content of the Certificate III in Agriculture have been set by the National Organisations relating to Agriculture, in consultation with Australian National Training Authority and is presented by registered training organisations.

### **Training:**

Training may be conducted on a TAFE campus but where possible workshops will be held on the properties of group participants. These days are shared around as much as possible, meaning that the training takes place in an industrial environment while exposing trainees to the practices of various enterprises.

This training is in addition to the ongoing training which takes place in the workplace during the normal completion of everyday tasks, and is supervised by the employer.

### **Co-ordination:**

The outcome of the Off-Farm training day and the workplace training are linked by the use of a log book which is signed by the trainer and confirmed by the course co-ordinator / lecturer. To meet the requirement of the qualification Trainee's must be deemed competent in a given number of units.

## ATTACHMENT 1 "A":

Typical workshop topics as presented as part of the On-Farm Training course. These workshops are delivered on a farming property where possible. The length of the workshop varies from 1 to 5 days, depending on the topic and may be extended over 4 seasons.

The list is not definitive and may be subject to change to suit the needs of the course participants:

- Introduction to Rural Mechanical Maintenance
- Welding
- Small engine maintenance
- Chemical Card
- Farm Safety
- Wheels, Rims, Tyres
- Firearms Licence
- Front End Loader accreditation
- Licences, vehicle registration and permits
- First Aid
- Tractor design and maintenance
- Header functions, maintenance and operation
- Vehicle air conditioning maintenance
- Auto Electrical
- Record keeping and cash books
- Farm computer programs
- Crop monitoring
- Farm Safety Audit
- Finance and consumer affairs.
- Animal classification
- Animal nutrition
- Soils
- Crop diseases
- Workplace communications