

PICSE Canberra Think Tank (21st June, 2011)

“Positions Vacant: Young Scientists wanted for Australia’s Future Food Security”

Key Issues to Emerge

The views presented and discussed at the Think Tank are being distilled into an Outcomes Paper to inform invitees to the Think Tank, as well as the PICSE National Advisory Board. This will include key strategies to inform thinking about the future human capacity issues relating to Australia’s Future Food Security. PICSE and AgriFood Skills Council will also be preparing a Market Intelligence Paper describing the current capacity landscape in which our joint approach will operate. To put this in context, data was presented at the Think Tank demonstrating that, at best, Australia is producing only a third of the agricultural graduates the industry needs at present per annum and the situation will only get worse as a result of declining enrolments in tertiary agricultural science courses.

In the meantime, this summary describes the **key issues** presented by participants at the Think Tank:

1. Over the last 12 years **PICSE** has developed and trialled a **successful strategy** to build a capacity value chain to address Australia’s Future Food Security;

- **Students** – “PICSE has entirely changed my career aspirations and now I want to study Agricultural Science at UWA. I now have a clear future career pathway.” Brydie Creagh, Albany, WA. Represents common student views expressed at the Think Tank.
- **Teachers** – The consensus was that teachers are crucial influencers in young people’s career aspirations. “PICSE showcases the relevance of primary industries, achieving attitudinal change in teachers and their students”. Sue Lanham, PICSE Science Education Officer (former teacher).
- **Government Departments** – Representatives reported the need for PICSE to create stronger partnerships and links with national organisations like the CRCs, as there is a need for increased numbers of PhDs (to support an enhanced future research workforce).
- **Agribusiness** – Attraction of the right young people with the right core skills is a crucial part of securing the personnel to ensure Agriculture remains a growth industry. PICSE takes a key role in selecting suitable young people, enthuses them into a primary industry career pathway via tertiary training at universities.
- **Politicians** – “A key issue is to get the right, positive message to young people. It is apparent that the PICSE program is doing just that.” Tony Windsor MP.
- **Universities** – “A 2050 Challenge was defined: This is about co-developing solutions to create a new way of supplying quality food by 2050. It recognises that Agriculture provides the most important careers available. PICSE promotes this to students, engaging selected students with local primary industries, research organisations and universities.” Prof Holger Meinke, School of Agricultural Science, UTAS.
- **Research and Development Corporations (RDCs)** – “One of the core future problems in the grains industry is to secure sufficient numbers and quality of tertiary trained people. PICSE is a key part of the solution, thus it has had our long term support.” Jody Higgins, GRDC.

2. **Building additional Partnerships** to take PICSE to the next level:

- **Students** – As a result of working side by side with scientists in industry, I have completely changed my views and see that I will be completely engrossed in a career in primary industries.
- **Teachers** – PICSE facilitates the building of partnerships between relevant primary industries and teachers, hence achieving attitudinal change in teachers and their students.
- **Government Departments** – The role of universities is to partner with industry, to support infra-structure development. The role of government is to support initiatives like PICSE, which is known to be successful in brokering such partnerships.
- **Agribusiness** – I now mentor students going through the PICSE program to share my enthusiasm and experience with younger people, to support it in building future partnerships.
- **Politicians** – We need to get the message to young people, city and country alike, that there are opportunities in primary industries and unmet demand.
- **Universities** – Food science extends from the core sciences, to every part of food production, to the whole food supply chain, including an understanding of food supply chains, innovations, etc.
- **RDCs** – The RDCs see a need for those involved in this strategic area (human capacity) to collaborate as it is a competitive landscape for RDC investments.