



Primary Skills Victoria

Tel: (03) 9210 9470
Fax: (03) 9210 9471
Email: admin@psv.com.au
Website: www.psv.com.au

621 Burwood Highway
Knoxfield VIC 3180

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2006

19 May 2005

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Inquiry into Rural Skills Training and Research

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your invitation to comment on the rural skills training needs within Australia. Our comments are centred on the situation with which we are very familiar, that of the training environment within Victoria.

Primary Skills Victoria is an incorporated body funded by the Victorian Learning and Employment Skills Commission (VLESC) to provide advice to the state government's Office of Training and Tertiary Education concerning the training needs of rural and related industries (for background see attached brochure "Gateways")

The PSV Council draws industry members from across not only agriculture but also the related industries of horticulture, animal management and conservation both on its governing council and its standing committees within each sector. It also has a close working relationship with farmer organisations such as the VFF, Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) in regional areas as well as TAFE institutes providing training to the farming community.

Many of the issues confronted by Council members on a regular basis will be raised by others responding to your invitation, however may we highlight the issue of the difficulty of attracting young people to the industry.

ABS statistics record a much higher proportion of the 65+ age cohort still working in the industry and a much lower percentage of the younger cohorts 15-19 and 20-24 year-old age groups within the industry compared with the national averages for all of industry. For this reason the Council is delighted with the federal government initiatives to re-introduce pilot Technical Schools into a number of regional centres within the state. It was however a great disappointment for Council members to learn that agriculture was not listed as one of the sectors whose training needs were to be addressed through this initiative.

Technical schools were an integral part of the educational profile for many years in Victoria and in regional areas had a strong focus on agricultural training providing

valuable early encouragement and skills development in this area resulting in many young people moving on to a career in the industry.

Delivery of agricultural programs both within the TAFE system and via VET in Schools programs has shrunk dramatically from around the time of the establishment of TAFE institutes in the state and the demise of the Technical school system in the 1980's. It is of interest to note that in the late 70's and early 80's there were around 65 wool teachers alone within Technical schools around the time of the establishment of TAFE colleges, today in regional TAFE institutes there are around 5. Similar statistics are quoted for staff in regional areas teaching the initial Apprenticeship in Farming for the early 80's compared to the present day. This reduction in regional delivery for the sector is not totally attributable to this shift; it is a factor along with many others. These include: -

- The lack of encouragement of parents and the strongly negative views of many secondary teachers concerning careers in this industry.
- Minimal exposure to the industry during student's school careers.
- Salaries in other industries appear more attractive.
- Increasing isolation in rural areas with the reduction in general services.
- Lack of entertainment in regional areas and the desire of young people to relocate to regional and metropolitan centres.
- The negative image of the farmers themselves and that of the rural media.

Some sectors are suffering a more severe shortage of labour than others. The dairy industry is one example of others that could be cited. A survey conducted amongst secondary school students by RMIT's Centre for Workplace Culture Change found that while large numbers were interested in trades and the helping professions, agriculture and dairy rated very low. Of the 700 Victorian secondary school students surveyed only 15 indicated that they would be interested in a career in the dairy industry.

Poor perceptions of this industry will be hard to turn around but it is essential that this be achieved to redress the low numbers of the younger cohort in the industry in this state. Other states have excellent examples of delivery at the secondary level and the Council would like to see the commonwealth contribute to this through its Technical School initiatives in Victoria. The Council is convinced of the value of students in secondary schools being given early exposure to the industry to provide positive experiences so that they have a greater understanding of the employment opportunities and career paths within the industry itself and other associated industries.

Members of the Council would be delighted if your committee would see fit to include a recommendation to this effect in its final report.

Yours sincerely,

James Dennis
Chairperson
Agriculture Standing Committee - PSV