



# **SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO RURAL SKILLS TRAINING AND RESEARCH**

Level 2 AMP Building, 1 Hobart Place, Canberra ACT 2601  
Locked Bag 916, Canberra ACT 2601

Phone : (02) 62306399  
Fax: (02) 62306355

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Avcare Limited, the National Association for Crop Protection and Animal Health, welcomes the opportunity to submit to the Inquiry into Rural Skills Training and Research.

## **BACKGROUND**

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Avcare is the peak industry body that represents well over 80% of the agricultural and veterinary chemicals sales in Australia. Since 1989, Avcare has built a sizable business in the stewardship area, with the aim of reducing and managing the risks of industry products.

In 1994, an independent but wholly owned company, Agsafe Limited, was formed to manage a training and accreditation program for industry personnel and premises. This program has been highly successful, with over 20,000 personnel trained and accredited, as well as 1453 stores accredited.

In 1999, Agsafe was tasked with managing a new clean empty drum collection and disposal program '*drumMUSTER*', which is part of an overarching Industry Waste Reduction Agreement with other stakeholders such as the Department of Environment and Heritage, Avcare, the National Farmers' Federation (NFF), the Veterinary Manufacturers and Distributors' Association (VMDA) and the Australian Local Government Association.

In 2004, a third waste management program 'ChemClear<sup>®</sup>', was initiated that will collect and dispose of any unwanted, registered agvet chemical. This program is also managed by Agsafe on behalf of Avcare, the NFF and the VMDA.

## **CURRENT ISSUES**

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The improper use of agvet chemicals such as through spray drift and residue violation, has the potential to bring about injury to the user thereof. However, such use also has the potential for a wider impact, namely upon product safety and consumer health, with flow-on effects in the areas of consumer confidence and ultimately, export markets.

Industry strongly supports the proper and safe use of agvet chemicals, which it advocates can only be fully achieved through the provision of comprehensive skills development programs for primary producers.

In this regard, primary producers require a national training system that ensures all States and Territories operate under equivalent standards. However, Avcare considers that at present, there are a number of barriers preventing the achievement of such, including:

- A National Training Framework that permits varied skill levels based upon the simulated workplace assessment situation utilised;
- Inconsistencies in State regulations that see only some States apply mandatory training requirements, with different standards for skill levels applying in such States;
- A competency based assessment system that does not easily provide the relevant technical information and understanding required to effectively manage spray drift in broad acre situations;

- A perception that through their lack of financial support, Government does not consider training to be a priority; and
- A lack of:
  - Government support for the principle of reaccreditation every 5 years, thus resulting in farmers not remaining abreast of legislative and technological developments; and
  - Government support for training for primary producers from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds or for participants with low language and literacy levels.

At the same time, the introduction of new training and assessment standards for the rural sector under the National Training Framework has considerably raised the average training standards for users of agvet chemicals.

It is imperative that these barriers be dealt with, however, in doing so it is important that recognition is given to the on-going drought faced by Australian farmers and the significant impact this is having upon their financial viability.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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The rural industry's strong support for proper and safe use of agvet chemicals is also reflected by the fact that Avcare has been a founding member of the NFF lead *ChemCert* program. Avcare therefore endorses the recommendations of the *ChemCert* Australia submission, highlighting the following:

- The National Training Framework to be improved to provide greater scope to deal with technical knowledge requirements and to provide recognition for attaining technical expertise.
- Government to re-adopt a leadership role in supporting industry's push for Level 3 training and 5 yearly reaccreditation for all agvet chemical users in Australia. and in ensuring any regulatory approaches are standardised and consistent with the National Training Framework.
- Industry experts to be involved in assessing the quality of agvet chemical user training being delivered.
- The Workplace English Language and Literacy Programme guidelines to be revised in consultation with industry to ensure they are applicable to the structure of the rural sector.
- Reinstatement of eligibility of agvet chemical user training for FarmBis funding.

The Government's pledge in the Budget 2005/06 to reinstate financial assistance to improve skills in business and resource management must be extended to training in agvet chemicals.

In addition to the above recommendations, Avcare wishes to stress the need for more practical research into why people learn and under what circumstances people learn best. One of the set Key Performance Indicators for the Avcare stewardship programs is to measure the adoption of the waste management practices by farmers. Specifically, the **drumMUSTER** program measures the return rate of empty, clean containers submitted to collection sites, which currently is in the vicinity of 40%. Why is it not 60% or even higher?

What makes some farmers adopt a new practice that has clear environmental benefits, whereas other farmers resist change? What role does attitude play in changing behaviour, and equally important, what role does regulation and strict enforcement play in changing behaviour on a permanent basis?

Avcare therefore recommends that:

- Further research is carried out to understand the attitudinal motivators and barriers to adopting a culture of continuous improvement in managing agvet chemical management.