

## Agricultural Competitiveness Issues Paper

This submission concerns three of the listed areas,

Issue 5: Enhancing agriculture's contribution to regional communities,

Issue 6: Improving the competitiveness of inputs to the supply chain and

Issue 9: Assessing the effectiveness of incentives for investment and job creation.

In Mansfield, Victoria, an innovative food & fibre program partners the local secondary school, primary producers and TAFE in a 21<sup>st</sup> century approach to enthusing young people about career pathways in agriculture. Its success story is one that should be part of a multi-faceted approach to skill-development and career structure in food and fibre industries. It should be replicated across Australia since it is delivering demonstrable outcomes in a cost-effective and sustainable way. In order for it to be rolled out, it requires packaging and marketing.

While this response will deal primarily with the '*Mansfield Model*' **PRE Ag**, it is important to acknowledge other facets of need in the big picture of education, careers and attracting young people.

1. Some schools already deliver successful outcomes via agricultural farms. Two noteworthy aspects of these are that
  - a) some struggle in terms of succession – see *Rural Skills Education & Training (DAFF Inquiry 2007)2.13*
  - b) some struggle in terms of cost
  - c) this 20<sup>th</sup> century model cannot be widely replicated in today's world because of the huge cost of infrastructure
2. Centralised, specialist schools deliver sophisticated outcomes at great cost to a few.
3. TAFE programs are crucial to delivering applied learning options. Past government focus though, as shown by inquiries in the mid-nineties, naively believed that concentrating funding on only post-secondary solutions would attract young people into careers. We know that to attract keen, intelligent contributors to the industry, we need to inspire secondary students. The current danger is that state governments cut TAFE funding or provide no continuity of funding. This needs to change.
4. Some Universities are now beginning to scaffold career pathways so that Certificate courses can lead onto Diplomas can lead on to Degree courses if desired e.g. CSU, UNE and Melb Uni – Dookie.
5. Creative programs are often isolated and only receive localised funding e.g. the Pilot program **AG GAP**, developed by NETracks LLEN in partnership with Wangaratta, Benalla & Mansfield Shires and Melb Uni – Dookie, which is encouraging students to take a GAP year in rural studies (highly recommended that this model is considered in your final report).
6. While more recent 'experiential' programs have been part of exposing students to growing vegetables or basic animal husbandry and as such play a part in delivering a broad curriculum and raising the profile of food & fibre in our lives, they do not deliver the sophisticated skill set required by primary producers.
7. The shortage of qualified AG teachers needs to receive attention from Departments of Education and universities or teacher-training institutions.

8. Careers teachers need to be supplied with sophisticated material with which to promote careers as per the armed forces.
9. The delivery of YR 12 Ag/Hort also suits some schools however many rural schools cannot offer this without eliminating another subject; it is not necessary to offer Ag at Yr 12 if students complete Certificates II & III and ASBAs – applied learning options. Protection of Yr 12 accreditation for Certificate courses is essential for career pathway options to be broad i.e. into universities or TAFE. Already this is threatened in Victoria.

Reports and Inquiries by governments, departments and industry bodies have continued (at least since the mid-nineties) to make recommendations – albeit sensible – but not the funding to roll these out e.g. Victorian Parliamentary *Inquiry into the capacity of the farming sector to attract and retain young farmers and respond to an ageing workforce*, Victorian Government *Education and Training Committee Inquiry into Agricultural Education and Training*, Vict'n DEPI, 2013, NSW Gov't *Review into Agricultural Education and Training in New South Wales*, NFF, etc., etc.,

The problem has already been identified. The proposed solutions up til now have mainly been those seeking to reproduce models of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. I propose that this is backward looking and that one of the solutions is the Mansfield Model: *Partnerships in Rural Education* which is described below.

## **PRE - Ag**

# **Partnerships in Rural Education**

**... A program that builds skills and strengthens rural communities through partnerships between schools, primary producers and TAFE.**

For over five years now, the Mansfield pilot program has been delivering **PRE - Ag** - a successful, trans-disciplinary (Science and Geography) Yr 9 - 10 Agribusiness course - while creating important partnerships between an increasingly urbanised community and various rural industries. The program provides exciting applied learning environments and career pathways for students in agricultural and land management areas.

Students are partnered with mentors who provide tuition and guidance in settings as diverse as cattle yards, shearing sheds, and hydroponic sheds. This links local producers with students, stimulating community growth and development as well as acknowledging and building upon the experience and traditions of the past. Our young people are thus encouraged to be the competent, innovative and passionate contributors so valued by rural industries.

In order to deliver this program, the school has formed about 90 partnerships - with local farmers, the shire, Landcare and other rural industries and importantly with GOTAFE (Goulburn Ovens TAFE), the providers for Certificate II in Agriculture which students complete.

The course addresses the dire need of land management and primary production industries for skilled young people to choose careers in this area. It is different from other 'farm experience' courses offered at some schools because it happens in 'real', applied learning environments and because the pathways for school based apprenticeships, TAFE certificates and University courses are all in place for career opportunities.

### **BACKGROUND**

The development of the course came about in response to the obvious dilemma of an aging (mostly) resident farming community facing rapid demographic change, juxtaposed with young people who need learning environments that deliver relevant curriculum in applied learning contexts. We were struck by the lack of knowledge and farm experience of most students – even in rural areas.

We strive to attract keen and proficient contributors to agriculture and believe that our young people can be those people given the opportunity to experience rural industries. Such career choices have barely been on the radar in many communities but that is changing in Mansfield thanks to this course and a strong culture of ASBAs (Australian School Based Apprenticeships – and its inherent relationship with TAFE).

We were not alone in our concern. The problem of attracting and retaining young people in agriculture has been of concern to governments and those working in the rural sector for a number of years and any number of documents addressing this area are available<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> DAFF Inquiry 2007, Future Farming DPI 2008, NFF – 2008, Vic Parliamentary Inquiry 2012, NSW Parliamentary Inquiry 2013, DEPI Vic 2013 etc.. etc.,

### STRUCTURE in PILOT

#### Students:

- in Semester 1: attend local community placement as a whole class with supervising teachers one day a week (from 11am → on) visiting farms for a range of activities e.g. lamb marking, tree planting, drenching, preg testing.
- in Semester 2: attend individual placements one day a week (from 11am →).
- All year: one day a week (from 11am →) studying science and geography at school and complete written work for Certificate II in Agriculture through GOTAFE (Goulburn Ovens TAFE).
- Are organised in terms of transport, appropriate clothing, footwear, tools and lunch.

#### Rural Community:

- In Semester 1 - rural industries and organisations have a class of supervised students observe and/or work in agriculture and land management areas e.g. crutching, marking, shearing, pruning, planting trees, fencing, harvest picking.
- In Semester 2 – Primary Producers & those in associated industries take on a student to mentor.

### OUTCOMES

<b><u>Pilot Program</u></b> <b>Mansfield Secondary College:</b> <b>average 450 students</b>	<b>Prior to introduction of</b> <b><i>Agribusiness 2009</i></b>	<b>Post Introduction <i>Agribusiness</i>: 2009 →</b> <b>2 cohorts have currently graduated from Yr 12 &amp;</b> <b>approx. 1/3 of Yr 9 students do Ag</b>
<b>No. of Certificate Courses in Primary Industries undertaken by students</b>	4 in previous 5 years	<b>103</b> - <i>Agribusiness</i> 2009 – 2013 (Cert II from 2010 →) <b>32</b> have continued with Certificate Courses after finishing <i>Agribusiness</i> (Ag, Hort, Equine)
<b>No. of other courses or work in the industry undertaken</b>	<b>0</b> other courses. Unknown numbers at work - few	<b>24</b> worked/working full or part time in the industry and/or attended other courses (Some overlap with this number) Some students employed as casual labour at peak times e.g. shearing
<b>University courses in Primary Industry</b>	1 in previous 5 years	<b>2</b> ex- <i>Agribusiness</i> students, <b>2</b> other non-Ag students through the raised profile in school (i.e. <b>4</b> in 2 years), a number of current Yr 12, 11 & 10 students now aiming at this.

The program also reveals more anecdotal, but nonetheless ‘real’, data reflecting success in terms of personal and community development. Social-related data has identified improved perceptions of school and teachers by some disaffected students who participate in the course. This more positive attitude spills into other areas of schooling, relationships with the community and their family life. Central to such attitude changes are the relationships developed through mentoring by local farmers.

## FAQ

- **What safety measures underpin the relationship between primary producers and young students?**

*Students are enrolled in Cert II in Agriculture. PRE – Ag uses the existing TAFE structure to address insurance and working with children legislation.*

- **What on-going career pathways does PRE -Ag enable students to access?**

*PRE-Ag scaffolds pathways by using the existing Certificate courses, ASBAs, VCE and University systems. Students can continue with Certificates in Yr 10 & 11 following the initial Cert II e.g. Cert III in Ag, in Equine or in Hort. This can be part of an Aust School based Apprenticeship (ASBA) and can lead on to VCAL or VCE (Certs II & III are both accredited VCE units). Alternatively, the data shows that other students retain links with their mentors and complete VCE prior to choosing degree courses in Ag Science at university. Recently, universities such as the University of New England (UNE), Charles Sturt University (CSU) and University of Melb – Dookie, have acknowledged the need for scaffolded pathways and have linked Certificate courses with subsequent diploma and degree courses for those who wish to progress via an alternative to high-entry VCE scores.*

- **How can schools afford the costly infrastructure & general expense of creating a mini farm - simply not sustainable for many schools as pointed out in past inquiries?<sup>2</sup>**

*PRE-Ag does not replicate in miniature what already exists outside the school door. It uses real farms and real farm learning environments. It costs the school nothing to implement except for the teachers' wages. It transcends the old 'tech' school mentality.*

- **In a climate where few teachers graduate in ag-science and few have a rural-skills background, how do schools staff an agribusiness program?**

*PRE-Ag does not necessarily require teachers to have more than science and geography expertise as primary producers and TAFE provide specialised expertise.*

- **For schools, sustainability and succession stability are key attributes when implementing curriculum plans. How does PRE-Ag address these concerns when in existing programs we see individual teachers taking enormous personal responsibility to ensure the success of 'Ag' programs and the succession potential is limited?**

*PRE requires no infrastructure or animals; teachers are not required to spend weekends and holidays looking after animals. It does not entail the all-encompassing preoccupation of other models in order to succeed.*

- **How can communities form the partnerships required to implement PRE-Ag?**

*The rural community and its school both require organising representatives who liaise with each other. In the Pilot Program, the Geography teacher already had strong links with the rural community and brokered the partnerships, but this is not essential. One, or a small group of primary producers, can organise potential partners while the school and TAFE*

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<sup>2</sup> 2008 Submission to Rural Skills Education & Training by Rural Skills Victoria.

*formalise partnership details. Since the program addresses needs on each side, the desire for successful outcomes drives the relationships.*

- **What other costs for schools are associated with PRE-Ag?**

*Travel costs are the biggest expense. Bus travel is essential for students to have exposure to the myriad of 'food & fibre' industries as breadth of experience is essential. Funding from the delivery of a VETiS covers these costs.*

- **How does PRE-Ag address current government and industry directions?**

***PRE-Ag** is a leader in contemporary, cost-effective models and addresses student connection with rural studies pathway options, exceeding many current programs in terms of its timely delivery to teenagers, the sophistication of its practical content, the comparative ease of implementation and the cost-effective outcomes for school, students and the rural community. While government and industry inquiries into the problem continue with yet more proposals for very costly programs and infrastructure put forward, **PRE-Ag** has simply worked with the state's greatest assets, primary producers. It targets the students and communities with the most to gain and the most to lose; the students and communities with the most potential, talent and background to make lasting change. While designed to support rural communities, the model can be adopted to any industry.*

Julie Aldous

Mansfield Secondary College

