



Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper Submission - IP454
Youth Food Movement Australia
Submitted 17 April 2014

Agricultural Competitiveness Taskforce
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
PO Box 6500
CANBERRA ACT 2600

17 April 2014

Dear Minister Joyce,

The Youth Food Movement Australia (YFM) commends The Australian Government on their commitment to creating a stronger, sustainable and more competitive agricultural sector in Australia. YFM supports the objectives of The Agricultural Competitiveness Issue Paper (White Paper), however, as young people are the future of agriculture, we believe that a policy does not adequately consider the needs and potential of young people – both as consumers and as farmers – and will therefore not achieve these objectives. In this letter we outline our concerns and opportunities for consideration, in response to the White Paper, and will submit a more substantial submission to the Green Paper due for release later this year.

Youth Food Movement Australia
www.youthfoodmovement.org.au
Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper – Issues Paper Submission 1



Youth Food Movement (YFM) is a volunteer powered, not for profit organisation made up of young people¹ passionate about supporting Australian agriculture and creating a sustainable food system. Largely city based, YFM is building a nation-wide movement that brings young people together around food and agriculture issues. With a rapidly growing community of over 6,500 young people, and chapters in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, YFM exists to increase the food literacy levels of young Australians by building their capacity and motivation to support Australian Agriculture. We also raise the voice of young Australians concerned about food and agriculture so that together our generation can have our say in the decisions that impact our food future.

While the agricultural system faces many challenges, not only from climate anomalies but from a demographic shift away from the profession of farming, there is a rapidly growing interest and passion for sustainable food production among a new generation of Australians. If we are to make the most of this opportunity we must find a way to tap into the energy, creativity and ingenuity of young Australians. YFM urges an exploration of the role, young Australians have to play in food production and consumption and how this could serve to strengthen our agricultural industry.

YFM believes that young people will determine the future of agriculture both as *farmers* and *consumers*.

Young People as Consumers

YFM notes that the Issues Paper does not consider the powerful role that consumers – including young consumers – play to support the agricultural sector. As purchasing decisions are made based on how people understand and engage with agriculture and the food system, the purchasing power of young people impacts the growth and prosperity of agricultural markets. Into the future this impact will only increase.

At the 2011 Census there were 5.3 million Australians aged between 18 and 35.² These young people make up a distinct consumer category and influence family consumption. At present, this demographic is also missed by many food or agriculture focused education programs that focus school children. The considerable purchasing power of young people is illustrated by the fact that young people in the ten richest countries in the world spend more than

¹ The term 'young people' can be interpreted in many ways however YFM defines young people as those aged from 18 to 35. We base this definition on the age bracket considered by the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences' (ABARES) definition of young people for its Science and Innovation Awards for Young People in Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. <http://www.daff.gov.au/abares/pages/conferences-events/scienceawards/guidelines.aspx>

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011) 2011 Census QuickStats. Accessed from http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/0

\$700 billion USD every year.³ The current consumption patterns of young people will influence their consumption patterns in later life as well as the consumption patterns of their children.⁴

International research indicates increasing numbers of consumers are “food involved”. This means that they care deeply about food, where their food comes from and the processes used in production and manufacturing. This group is increasingly more influential; impacting the way food is raised, grown, packaged and sold globally.⁵ Combined with the growing number of young Australians who are adopting sustainable life practices⁶ it is clear that the changing nature of young peoples’ consumption patterns can have a considerable impact on the future of agriculture, and therefore must be considered

The influence of this demographic is felt across many of the issues outlined in the Issues Paper. Young people provide an additional niche market, access to which can help farmers diversify, improve competitiveness, increase profits and improve sustainability. Educated consumers help farmers improve farm gate returns, reduce risk and mitigate concentration of market power through alternative purchasing models such as Community Support Agriculture, food box schemes and farmer-direct purchasing. These alternative models will be explored further in YFM’s submission to the Green Paper.

The Issues Paper notes that farmers must be “responsive to the needs and demands of consumers; and also face expectations from governments and the community around a range of social and environmental issues.”⁷ YFM absolutely agrees with this point, however, we believe it is a two-way relationship. In order to consumers to understand the realities of food production, it is imperative ; it is vital for educated and passionate consumers to be responsive to the needs and demands of farmers. This should be recognised in the White Paper.

For this to occur in reality consumers must have access to information that facilitates informed purchasing decisions. They must also have a high level of basic education about food (or ‘food literacy’). This education and knowledge spans the impact of food on their health (nutrition) and the impact of their food choices on social and environmental systems. YFM is concerned that young people – especially those from low socio-economic backgrounds – do not have adequate access to the information required to make informed purchasing decisions. On the whole, young people, particularly those in urban areas, are largely unaware of the value and role of agriculture in the food system and how

³ Corcoran, & P. Osano, M. (2009) *Young People, Education and Sustainable Development: exploring Principles, perspectives and praxis*, Wageningen, the Netherlands, p. 273.

⁴ *Ibid* p. 273

⁵ Langley, S (2013), ‘Food ‘e-Vangelists’ monitoring brands and influencing global food market, survey’ Australian Food News. Available from, <http://www.ausfoodnews.com.au/2013/10/28/food-%E2%80%9Ce-vangelists%E2%80%9D-monitoring-brands-and-influencing-global-food-market-survey.html>

⁶ *Id*, note 4 p. 274

⁷ *Id*, note 2, p. 13.

their purchasing decisions can either help or harm farmers. Research indicates some young people have extremely limited understanding of food origins and production. In a recent survey, the Australian Council of Educational Research found that 45% of a late primary school and high school students could not identify that everyday lunchbox items such as a banana, bread and cheese originated from farms and 75% thought that cotton socks were an animal product.⁸ This is deeply problematic if we want young consumers to appreciate the role of agriculture and support farmers through their purchasing decisions.

YFM believes that the White Paper must recognise the importance of young consumers in supporting agricultural competitiveness, including educating young people about the food system, providing access to information on how and where food is grown and supporting schemes that connect farmers and consumers such as through experiential food education, innovative labelling systems, harnessing the power of the internet and social media and investing in platforms and initiatives that distribute food via direct consumer/producer relationships. It is crucial these initiatives and projects include young people throughout the conceptualisation, design and implementation to ensure greatest impact and return on investment.

Young People as Farmers

Young people are quite literally the future of farming. YFM is concerned however that the needs and potential of young people as farmers are not adequately reflected in the Issues Paper.

Not only will young people continue Australia's agricultural tradition, they present immense opportunity for innovation. Young people are vital to succession planning and ensuring sustainable and vibrant rural communities. Young peoples' capacity for innovation can assist in addressing many of the issues identified in the Issues Paper including: ensuring food security in Australia and overseas; improving competitiveness of agriculture and adaptation to social and environmental pressures.

Considering this immense potential of young people YFM recommends the White Paper focus more on how to meet the needs of young farmers (and potential young farmers) and explore how young people in rural and urban areas can be attracted and supported into agricultural careers.

It is widely recognised that Australia has an ageing farming population and the Issues Paper rightly acknowledges this. Australian Farmers tend to be significantly older than other workers. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)

⁸ Australian Council for Educational Research (2011), Food, Fibre and the Future. Available from <http://www.primaryindustrieseducation.com.au/resources/reports/foodfibrefuture.pdf>

reports that in 2011, the median age of farmers was 53 years, compared with 40 years for people in other occupations and that almost a quarter (23%) of farmers were aged 65 years or over, compared with just 3% of people in other occupations.⁹ The ABS concluded that the tendency of farmers to work beyond the average retirement age reflected the decline in younger generations taking over family farms.¹⁰ While this analysis from the ABS has been met with some criticism¹¹ it is undeniable that if young people are not attracted and supported into farming careers, this demographic trend will be difficult to reverse.

Why do young people leave family farms and why, even though many rural and urban young people are interested in farming are they not able to enter the industry? While there is some evidence about why young people are leaving rural areas and barriers to entry for new farmers, YFM believes that there is a substantial research gap that must be closed if Australian Government policy is going to be able to adequately deal with this changing demographic.

As an organisation YFM is particularly interested in the barriers faced by urban young people who want to take up agriculture as a career. From our community of over 6,500 young people, we have collected anecdotal evidence that many young people in urban areas are passionate about being farmers yet face an array of hurdles when trying to enter the profession. The Issues Paper rightly notes that getting started in farming is a challenge for newcomers with high capital costs and technical knowledge barriers.¹² However, in an Australian context research has failed to examine the issue in-depth, including: who is trying to enter the industry, the extent of the barriers they face and the impact of policy decisions on overcoming or increasing these barriers. YFM recommends that this research, similar to that carried out in the United Kingdom,¹³ be funded by the Australian Government or carried out by the Department of Agriculture's research agencies.

Research should also consider innovative solutions to overcoming entry barriers, such as alternative financing schemes and pioneering land leasing and land sharing arrangements, which support the entry of newcomers from both rural and urban backgrounds. Based on adequate research, federal funding should be dedicated to targeted pilot schemes. Potential models for pilot schemes will be explored further in YFM's submission to the Green Paper.

⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012) Australian Farming and Farmers, available from <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features10Dec+2012>

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ see, eg http://www.farminstitute.org.au/blog/Ag_Forum/post/farmers-are-getting-older-but-its-not-a-problem/

¹² *id.*, note 1 p 13

¹³ See, eg Williams, F. 'Number 17. Barriers Facing New Entrants to Farming' <http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/bitstream/46002/2/Work17%20Williams.pdf> –an Emphasis on Farming.' Land Economic Working Paper Series. Available from

Finally, as the Issues Paper notes¹⁴ it is important to attract more young people than currently are attracted into agriculture. The Issues Paper identifies that the numbers of students enrolled in agricultural courses has been declining affecting the supply of skilled labour over the long term.¹⁵

YFM believes that more young people – from both rural and urban areas – would be drawn into a career in agriculture if tertiary degrees were improved to address current issues and reflect contemporary values. Updating tertiary curricula to ensure relevance to a modern farming context would improve the uptake of agricultural courses. As young people are increasingly interested in issues of sustainability,¹⁶ holistic agricultural courses, which teach sustainable agricultural concepts and adopt a food-systems approach, would be more attractive than traditional courses in conventional agriculture. So would a focus on the business principles and practice required in the real world as a farmer.

In addition, an increased focus on the importance of agriculture in primary and secondary education, as recommended above, could also positively impact levels of tertiary enrolment in agricultural courses.

To conclude YFM urge the Australian Government to consider the fundamental importance of young Australians to the future viability, productivity, profitability and sustainability of Australia's agricultural sectors and make provision for their inclusion in the White Paper.

Kind Regards,



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