

Tocal College Advisory Council

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7th April 2014

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

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Dear Sir/Madam

RE: Agricultural Competitiveness Taskforce

I am writing on behalf of the Advisory Council for Tocal College to inform the taskforce as to the importance of vocational education and training to enhance the competitiveness of Australian Agriculture. Tocal College is a registered training organisation operated by NSW Department of Primary Industries and provides VET services all across NSW and elsewhere in Australia. It is one of the few agricultural colleges to be operating in this country and has maintained strong enrolments over the years.

The College provides youth education for both full time and part time modes with fully residential services at its CB Alexander Campus, Tocal, Paterson. It also provides short courses throughout the country with many of them being run from its southern campus, Murrumbidgee Rural Studies Centre at Yanco. The College is a leader in e-learning for farmers and those involved in land management as well as being a producer of many agricultural books.

The College's attention was recently drawn to research undertaken in assessing the productivity and profitability of broad acre farming in south Western Australia.¹ A key finding from this research was that training does positively enhance farm performance. It does this because training develops human capital which then leads to innovation and from innovation you have improved farm performance.

This paper examined the trends in broad acre cropping, an industry which is greatly impacted by technology and the need for innovation. It clearly showed that the provision of good farm management and business training and education has significantly (albeit indirectly) improved farm productivity and profitability in "broad acre WA".

It would seem that in the past, innovation and the adoption to new technologies in agriculture is underpinned by training. In recent years we have seen a decline in the number of people undertaking training in agricultural and related studies. If the government wishes to stimulate the competitiveness in the rural and regional economies a clear investment in education and training would seem to be a wise strategy.

Tocal College has been operating for nearly fifty years and has graduates embedded in agricultural and related industries throughout Australia. Time and time again College staff and members of the Advisory Council see the great achievements made by College graduates. This anecdotal evidence drives the commitment of the College's staff to ever improve its training operation and delivery.

This recent paper and the address delivered at a conference by Ross Kingwell provides firm statistical evidence that the anecdotes and stories we hear regarding Tocal graduates are correct.

I therefore urge that you consider education and training as a cornerstone to build future competitiveness of the Australian agricultural sector.

Yours sincerely

Margo Duncan

Margo Duncan
Chair
Tocal College Advisory Council

¹ Nazrul Islam, Vilaphonh Xayavong and Ross Kingwell (2014) Broadacre farm productivity and profitability in south-western Australia Australian Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics, 58, pp. 1–24
The results of this research were presented at the 2014 ABARES Outlook Conference by Ross Kingwell