



MARCUS OLDHAM COLLEGE
"Developing Professionals In Agriculture"

Submission on the Future of Australian Agriculture

Background

Marcus Oldham College is the only independent agricultural college operating in Australia. The institution was founded in 1962 in Geelong, Victoria and attracts enrolments from all states and territories of Australia. The College mission is to prepare motivated progressive professionals who will excel in the emerging national and global environment. Marcus Oldham College values individuality, innovation, excellence and encourages leadership, loyalty and service to the community.

All courses offered at Marcus Oldham focus on business management as the core discipline. The academic programs delivered include a Bachelor of Business (Agricultural Management), Advanced Diploma of Farm Business Management and a Diploma of Agribusiness. Students pay fees of \$27,000 per year to live and study on the campus and 2005 has seen the highest student enrolment in the 43 year history of the College.

Education's Contribution to Agricultural Leadership

The future of our agricultural industries clearly lies with the education and training of our people. There are many providers of agricultural education in Australia comprising TAFE colleges, agricultural colleges, private providers and universities. All institutions are different in the courses they offer, the level of service they provide, fees charged, the quality of the students entering their programs and in many cases the employment positions their students secure upon graduation. Typically, students can choose to study on-campus, off-campus, on line, part-time, or full-time from a number of institutions around Australia. This diversity in the education marketplace is beneficial and essential, as it gives the customer (the student) choice.

The pathways from the vocational education and training (VET) sector through to higher education in Australia are clear and well documented. Students are provided with opportunities to move smoothly from certificate 1 courses to PhD if they are scholastically capable and motivated to achieve. Students wishing to

study at Marcus Oldham College receive advanced standing or recognition of prior learning for previous academic achievement or industry experience.

Since its founding in 1962, Marcus Oldham College has required students to work in industry for a minimum of 12 months prior to commencing their studies and to complete a second year of employment in the middle of their course. The structure of these programs ensures our graduates are closely linked to industry. The agriculture sector needs employees who have both practical skills and tertiary qualifications.

Managing farms requires the CEO to have a strong understanding of both business and systems management. Unfortunately, quite often young people entering agriculture are not encouraged to excel academically. Typically, for on-farm positions, employers seek staff who have practical experience, but they are not as stringent in their selection process regarding education levels. This philosophy needs to change if Australia is to secure and maintain an educated rural workforce for the future that can adapt to, and manage change.

We regularly hear stories of doom and gloom and often the perception of the wider community is that a career in the rural sector is not rewarding. This is not true. Marcus Oldham College, along with many other providers of agricultural education and training promote the very high employment rate of graduates upon completion of their course. The total number of farmers in Australia may be decreasing however the agribusiness and service sector to agriculture is growing.

The Federal Government's introduction of FEEHELP loans is a very positive access and equity move that now allows students who wish to study a higher education qualification at an approved provider of their choice financial assistance. These types of incentives will encourage young people to complete formal studies and therefore improve the management skill levels of farmers for the future.

The skills needs of agricultural industries in Australia.

Since the development of training packages, vocational education has become somewhat prescriptive and restrictive. There is little room for institutions to differentiate their courses from other providers. The rural industry has always promoted a very hands-on approach to management where workers needed to be able to complete all manual tasks such as welding, mechanics and fencing. Rural employers expect agricultural graduates to have these skills when they graduate from college however training manual skills in small groups is a very expensive form of delivery.

On the issue of industry skill requirements, the rural sector needs to support the colleges that provide vocational training. Without colleges to train young entrants to the industry, a large void would be created. The training provided by colleges saves rural employers money, as the students are educated in occupational health and safety, handling livestock and so forth. College graduates are job ready in the practical sense when they commence employment on farms.

It is important that rural employees are encouraged and supported to move from certificate courses further up the ladder into diploma programs. Lifelong learning and the development of cognitive skills in farmers is important to the rural sector of the future.

The role of extension in agriculture has changed considerably over the years with the private sector in the form of consultants taking on a much larger role in recent times.

With regard to research, a large proportion of the dollars are derived from subsidies on farmer's research levies. Research conducted by government departments can sometimes be viewed by farmers as irrelevant with no real on-farm application.

Over the years farmer driven and conducted research has come to the fore with the founding of groups such as Birchip Cropping and Southern Farming Systems in Victoria. It is apparent that farmers are keen to be involved and learn from applied research. It appears that often research money is used in the areas of technology and production gain, where dollars may be worthy allocated to business training to lift the management skills of farmers.

Providing Leadership Training to the Rural Sector

Australia's agricultural sector needs leaders who understand themselves, their industry and the global operating environments. Skills training and development in leadership will assist and secure our future rural ambassadors.

Marcus Oldham College recently delivered a five-day residential leadership course in Canberra for 40 young men and women currently working in agricultural industries. The program was organised and funded by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry with the objective to provide participants with the skills, knowledge and confidence to take a greater role in directing the future of their industries. Participants in the program came from all over Australia and it is training and skills development such as this, that need to be delivered to assist train and prepare our future leaders.

In addition, Marcus Oldham delivers a five-day rural leadership course at the College in June each year. This is a national program supported by many

industry groups and individuals. Several youth leadership courses are also delivered by Marcus Oldham College in regional areas throughout rural Victoria and are supported by the local shires and farming communities. Commonwealth Government financial support targeted towards developing future rural leaders would not only assist individuals, but also support the rural communities they serve.

The Commonwealth Government in the past has encouraged and supported farmers to upgrade their skill levels through schemes such as Farmbis. This training has been useful and mainly delivered in the form of short course training. Additional support may be considered from government in the future for young farmers in the form of formal education at the tertiary level.

Conclusion

The Principal of Marcus Oldham College is pleased to submit this paper and he acknowledges he is the sole author of the document.

Invitation to Visit Marcus Oldham College

The Chairman of Council, Mr W Robert R Beggs AM and the Principal invite the committee to visit our campus in Geelong, Victoria and meet our students. The College is located 90 minutes from Tullamarine airport in Melbourne and 30 minutes from Avalon near Geelong.

Mr Simon M Livingstone M.Sch.Mgt,Grad. Dip. FET.,B.Bus.,Dip.F.M.,A.I.M.M.
Principal

Contact Details

Marcus Oldham College
Private Bag 116
GEELONG MAIL CENTRE VIC 3221

PH: (03) 52433 533