

The Agriculture and food policy reference group:

The chairman, Mr Peter Corish;

I'm a young farmer who has been running my own farming business for seven years. I wrote the following paper for a recent challenge by the V.F.F. to outline the future issues and directions of Australian agriculture. I thought some ideas that I have touched on in this paper may be of benefit to your group. I am available for further discussion if you should like to talk with me.

I wish all members well as you seek to further Australia and its agricultural industries through your workings as a group.

Regards... Andrew Broad

VICTORIAN FARMERS FEDERATION: NEW GENERATION YOUNG FARMER CHALLENGE

From 1788 when members of the first fleet planted wheat near the Sydney harbor, Australia's agricultural industries have never been assured. The development and adaptation of farming techniques have been necessary to grow and sustain large scale food production in an often hostile climate.

Two hundred and seventeen years later, there are still challenges.

In order to encourage young people into the industry, we need to develop a "young farmers' business commencement scheme." Just as a person going to university has a H.E.C.S. debt, a young person meeting suitability criteria could access \$10 000 a year for four years to assist in the commencement of farming. At the end of the four years, the young farmer would be required to re-pay the total of \$40000 as his income increases (much the same as a university graduate pays back their education costs). The "young farmers' business commencement scheme" would assist suitable people into an industry that is often hard to enter.

Stamp duty is also a financial barrier. There needs to be stamp duty relief when purchasing an initial property. Nothing makes a young farmer more motivated than ownership; a sense of master of his/her own destiny.

The V.F.F. needs to start a community education taskforce. City people are sympathetic to rural Australia but most lack understanding of the complexities and production techniques involved in producing their food. If the Australian farmers of the future don't educate our non-farming population we leave ourselves open to dangerous self-interest groups such as PETA.

It is imperative to develop a "can do" attitude. An openness to technology that can advance Australian agriculture. Our climate is tough, so let's not be too quick to dismiss potential benefits that may arise from G.M. technology, yet proceed with caution.

We must also speak well of our individual businesses. We are professional business people dealing with declining terms of trade, uncertainty of climate and largely unsupportive governments. Yet we purchase farm utes and veli ides from manufacturers that openly "mock" and portray us as "simple" throughout their advertising campaigns. Loyalty must be shown to companies that acknowledge and portray a positive yet realistic image of the Australian farmer.

We need to develop agricultural education in the areas of science and farm management. As we experience climate variability, we need shorter season wheat varieties, nitrogen fixing cereal crops, and enhanced stem and stripe rust resistance. These are an example of challenges that we face into the future. Agriculture is but a link in the chain and skilled plant breeders are very important.

The large scale areas that are able to be managed by one labor unit, necessitates the need for those who manage the farms of the future to be well rounded in agronomy, environmental management and most importantly, business. Youth in agriculture brings enthusiasm, innovation and greater economic benefit to the people of Australia.

We need to recognize this and encourage governments to do everything in their power to ensure that we do not lose a generation of young farmers simply because of a run of below average rainfall events.

Every industry that supports Australia's Gross Domestic Profit is important. High Country Cattle grazing, live sheep and cattle exports, table grape production, citrus production, the list goes on. If we allow our industries to be wound down, leases not renewed, protested against and stopped, Australia will in generations be no better than the island nation of Nauru. Currently the way of life that Australians enjoy is underpinned by the mining industry. Although important, mining is not a sustainable industry indefinitely. Sustainable farming production is.

Water will be the gold of this century. The way we utilise water has greatly improved. Irrigated agriculture has a future in this country and is necessary. Twenty percent of world agriculture is irrigated and it produces forty percent of the world's food. As the cost of water increases, efficiencies improve through necessity. However, high technological efficiencies can only be implemented if the cost is passed on to the consumer. Australia will have sustainable irrigated agriculture into the future but the way forward will be difficult and not without controversy.

Three ingredients to Australian agriculture are faith, hope and love.

Faith that there is a long term future for those who take on the challenge of farming Australia's land.

Hope that through the dry, rain will fall again bringing crops, feed and full dams.

Love for this country that can blow dust in your face, yet somehow gets into your soul, so that you wouldn't want to be anywhere else.

Andrew Broad
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