



LAND A JOB

Youth pursuing agricultural careers is vital for the industry's successful continuation and two young women are demonstrating the effectiveness of programs in raising awareness of these employment pathways.

WORDS ALISON DANCE



OPPOSITE: EMMA LONGWORTH LEFT SYDNEY BEHIND IN SEARCH OF A SATISFYING CAREER IN AGRICULTURE. THIS PAGE: SHARNA HOLMAN IS ALREADY A MENTOR FOR YOUTH PURSUING CAREERS IN AGRICULTURE

With a growing population the demand for agricultural services and food is increasing but an agri-skills crisis threatens the ability of the industry to develop.

There are four jobs needing to be filled for every one graduate in an agricultural discipline indicating the present industry skill and labour demand is not being met.

Despite enrolment for tertiary agriculture studies increasing, the government projects the Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing industry's long-term decline in employment share to continue.

Skilled migrants and working holiday visa holders are currently essential to fill these critical employment shortages in agriculture.

Earlier this year the Turnbull government announced plans to replace visa subclass 457, used by skilled foreign workers including shearers, with a tighter program.

This could create opportunities to more efficiently address labour constraints by upskilling and educating Australians.

Emma Longworth (18) and Sharna Holman (23) both have a strong desire to work in the industry but have plenty more in common. They were neighbours in Sydney, Art4Agriculture and Sydney Royal Easter Show program participants, Muirfield High School students and studied agricultural degrees.

EMMA AND ARCHIBULL

Longworth's infatuation for agriculture stems from her school which enabled her to enter poultry competitions and join the Sydney Royal Easter Show Schools District Exhibits.

The Schools District Exhibits encourage students to plan, source and design a display which showcases their creativity and dedication. It also acts as a mentor program to entice future generations into the iconic District

Exhibit Display teams.

"I really enjoyed working with produce at the Show and even got to meet Prince William!" Longworth says.

A high school highlight for Longworth was The Archibull Prize competition which engages students in an assigned farming industry by decorating a fibreglass cow, keeping a regular blog and creating an animation or infographic

"Archibull was an eye opening experience in year nine where we explored industry issues through art and multimedia."

Longworth placed third for Primary Industries and eighth for Agriculture in the state and is now studying a Bachelor of Rural Science at the University of New England in Armidale.

"I loved agriculture in school and just thought why stay in Sydney when I

"Our sector's productivity and competitiveness relies on access to an adequately-resourced and skilled-labour pool," Kimberly Pearsall, National Farmers' Federation policy advisor specialising in work-place relations.

could move somewhere rural like Armidale,” Longworth says.

Longworth also secured work placement on a coffee plantation and an undergraduate position at a farming software company.

“I’m leaning towards cropping but my degree gives me experience in plants and animals to keep my options open,” she says. “I know wherever I end up I’ll be happy.”

Recently Longworth was awarded The Alan Eagle Scholarship which assists a young person passionate about agriculture to discover the specific industry they’d like to work in. This qualifies her as a Young Farming Champion, in common with Holman.

SHARNA THE CHAMPION

Holman has always adored animals but it was also on the school’s full hectare farm where her love for agriculture grew and led her to graduate with a Bachelor of Science (Agriculture) from Sydney University.

She then moved 16 hours to Emerald Queensland as a cotton extension officer connecting growers to information, working on research trials and organising workshops.

“Everyone needs to eat and everyone needs clothes so there will always be incredible opportunities in agriculture,” Holman says.

Longworth agrees saying, “We have to feed the world somehow with our growing population.”

In 2016 Holman became a Young Farming Champion (YFC), a mentor program for agricultural ambassadors who sow the seed for youth to consider careers in primary industries.

“I enjoy speaking at schools and hope to teach kids in cities and regional areas that there’s more to agriculture than working on a farm,” Holman says.

“Agriculture is an exciting field and the depth of career opportunities is amazing, you can tie any job into agriculture from business to journalism.”

To date 70 YFC’s have been trained in skills for leading transformational change and engaged with 140,000 students.

The program encourages participants to use these skills in their workplace, to join boards, speak at conferences and

compete for awards with the aim to raise the agriculture industry’s profile.

YFC and The Archibull Prize come under the banner of Art4Agriculture, a network of young people passionate about sharing the contribution of Australian farmers in feeding the world.

National Program Director, Lynne Strong, says Art4Agriculture provides access to mentors and wants agriculture to become the first career choice for the next generation.

“YFC’s like Sharna Holman show students you don’t have to own a farm or be a farmer to play an important role in producing the food that feeds us and the clothes we wear,” Strong says.

The RAS lends support to the Art4Agriculture program amongst others, hosting the Archibull Awards ceremony and showcasing the entries.

“The Royal Agricultural Society is committed to supporting such fantastic programs as it provides another medium for students to engage in the paddock to plate story,” Murray Wilton, RAS General Manager, Agriculture and Sydney Royal Easter Show, says.

NSW primary industries gross value production is estimated at a record high \$13.9 billion and from 2014-15 almost 165,000 people were either directly employed or working in manufacturing roles. ■

Youth and RAS

The RAS also has initiatives for education and development including Youth Group, school animal husbandry and competitions to promote, foster and encourage the sustainable development of NSW agriculture.

Danielle Krix, RAS Manager Agricultural Development, says education is essential to forge the future of agriculture.

“The RAS engages with over 3,500 schools to deliver education resources which educate the community on the value of sustainable agriculture,” Krix says.

“Our school programs are designed by educational professionals with an extensive range of creative and engaging syllabus-based resources covering topics like food origin, genetics, farming seasons and of course career opportunities.”

The RAS Foundation has invested more than \$2.86 million into country NSW through a range of grants and scholarships including support of over 300 tertiary students who are passionate about playing an active role in the future of rural NSW.

“The students on our Rural Scholarship Program are all future contributors to the agriculture industry,” Kate Ross the RAS Foundation Executive Officer says.

“Some achieve this directly as agronomists, wool classers or farm managers and others as dedicated members of farming communities such as nurses, teachers, doctors, mechanics and vets.”

Each year the Sydney Royal Easter Show media centre runs an internship program for university students studying Communications, which provides networking opportunities with state-wide media, potential employment pathways and possible contribution to their degree. Final year university students studying journalism, public relations or photography are exposed to the best of NSW agriculture.

For Longworth and Holman, two city women now passionately pursuing careers in primary industries, their message to fellow youth is clear – help create a sustainable future through agriculture.

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