

Australian Council of Deans of Agriculture Media Release

Deans endorse Minister Gillard's education initiatives

The Federal Government's proposal to increase the proportion of the population with degree qualifications has met with the endorsement of the Australian Council of Deans of Agriculture. Education Minister Julia Gillard recently announced that the Government had a target of 40% of the 24 to 35 year age group to have a university degree by 2025.

Professor Roger Leigh, President of ACDA, said that agriculture has an absolute need for a well-trained workforce. "Modern agriculture is a complex, highly technological industry and needs a highly educated workforce from farmers to research to international marketing" Professor Leigh said. "The general community does not seem to appreciate just how important agriculture is to their wellbeing and standard of living. This industry provides Australians with the World's best quality, safest food at cheap prices and at the same time sustains Australia's balance of payments by exporting over 60% of production."

The Productivity Commission (2005) indicated that only 7% of the agricultural sector had a degree compared to around 22% of the general population. "This is totally unacceptable for agriculture" commented Professor Leigh.

All the indications are for growth in markets due to increased demand for food internationally. Australia is well placed to grow its markets but this will only be done if the industry has a workforce capable of meeting the food production challenges of climate change, drought and water limitations, new technologies, environmental compliance and quality assurance according to ACDA. It also needs to be understood that farmers manage over 60% of the Australian landscape and therefore look after its natural resources and biodiversity for the community.

"Education is the key to a sustainable future and Minister Gillard is to be congratulated for her initiative" added Professor Leigh.

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