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Ag education and industry bodies unite to deliver on recommendation

The primary recommendation arising from an agriculture education forum held in October 2021 has been realised with the formation of the Tasmanian Agricultural Education and Training Partnership (TAETP).

More than 50 key members of the education sector and agriculture industry stakeholders attended the Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture's (TIA) Agriculture Training and Education for the Future Forum held in Launceston on 1 October 2021.

The forum was the third agriculture education forum TIA has facilitated since 2015.

"The intention for the forum, and previous events, was to provide the opportunity for invited key stakeholders to participate in discussions about current and future agriculture education and training needs in Tasmania, and how these needs might be met," TIA's Associate Head Learning & Teaching, Associate Professor Alistair Gracie said.

"At the conclusion of the October 1 forum all present agreed on the next step, and now that we have those members in place, the TAETP can begin the task of addressing and actioning solutions, where appropriate, to topics, issues and opportunities for education and training in agriculture and food."

The TAETP has representation from TasTAFE, the Department of Education, Catholic Education, the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association (TFGA), the Tasmanian Agricultural Productivity Group (TAPG) as well as recent graduates from various programs.

A key supporter from the start, Mr Dick Warner, along with his wife, former Governor of Tasmania Professor Kate Warner, hosted the first and second forums at Government House.

"The Agricultural Education and Training forum held in 2021 was the third education forum facilitated by TIA that I have been involved with and arguably the most important," Mr Warner said.

"Agriculture is important to Tasmania: it employs approximately 14,000 people, represents almost 6 per cent of the State's annual gross product and it is something we are good at.

"However, the challenges ahead for agriculture are significant. Whether it's meeting the growth target set by the State Government, improving productivity, developing improved water and soil management practices, managing a changing climate, reducing food waste, or simply meeting market demand for cost-competitive quality products nationally or internationally.

"Improved education and training, whether at degree or vocational level, is crucial to enable Tasmania's agricultural industries to meet these and other future challenges."

The purpose of the TAETP is to provide strategic advice and leadership to key stakeholders involved in achieving several goals, including increasing the profile and importance of the agricultural and food industry and education to attract new entrants; raising aspirations and educational attainment in the Tasmanian agricultural community; and to facilitate increased and seamless pathways into education and training.

“The benefits of improved educational attainment to individual wellbeing and to sustainable economic growth of communities are well documented,” TIA Director, Professor Michael Rose, said.

“There is significant opportunity to help improve the average level of educational attainment in Tasmania while equipping a future skilled workforce to underpin the sustainable growth of the State’s dynamic agriculture and food sector.

“TIA has the mandate to progress the agriculture industry of Tasmania through the provision of industry-relevant research and development, encouraging the industry adoption of findings, and through the delivery of educational offerings relevant to Tasmania,” Professor Rose said.

TIA’s Strategic Plan *TIA Strategies and Initiatives to make a difference* includes two initiatives that specifically focus on education: shifting the perception of agriculture, with a focus on getting school-age children excited about a career in the agriculture and food industry; and refocusing the curriculum and student experience to enable the growth of agriculture and food in Tasmania.

“As a joint venture between the University of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Government, TIA’s Strategy is aligned with the strategic plans of each,” Professor Rose said.

“The University is committed to the responsible use of Tasmania’s agricultural resources for economic growth and the sustainable management of the island’s unique environment.

“Equally, the Tasmanian Government sees agriculture and food production as a key driver of the state’s economic growth. TIA is well positioned to be a key enabler of these aims.”

Led by the University of Tasmania and comprising representation from key education and training providers, government agencies and industry leaders, the TAETP will meet quarterly.

TIA is a joint venture of the University of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Government.

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