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Food, fuel and climate change mitigation: How can agriculture do it all?

After being overlooked for several decades, agricultural policy is now back in the limelight and a key focus for governments around the world. This is also the case in Australia, with the Australian government working on a National Food Plan, food security policies, water policies, renewable energy policies and a carbon tax aimed at reducing national greenhouse emissions. In all these, agriculture has a central role, but the potential exists that these policies will result in contradictions, because the sector only has limited resources available, and is facing increasing input costs, day to day volatility in national and international markets, and the decreasing investment in agricultural R&D and regional services.

The potential conflicts and contradictions between these different policy areas are the subject of the papers contributed to the Summer edition of the *Farm Policy Journal*. It includes contributions from international experts, as well as students who provided entries for the Institute's John Ralph Essay Competition.

'Recent food price spikes have created a renewed interest in the intersection between food and energy policy, especially given the growth of biofuel production globally' said Mick Keogh, Executive Director of the Australian Farm Institute.

'Seen from a farm perspective, the emergence of these issues signals a period of opportunity for farm businesses in a nation such as Australia, where agriculture of necessity has a strong export focus.

'Collectively, these papers highlight the opportunities and challenges that face agriculture given the divergent demands that will be placed on the sector in the future. What emerges from these papers is the realisation that while concerns about future food and energy security are community-wide, the response will depend on decisions made by the managers of individual businesses.'

'To put it bluntly, while policy-makers and opinion writers may well proclaim that 'we' need to take this or that direction in relation to agriculture, there is no 'we' in Australian agriculture – a nation which expends the lowest amount of GDP on its agriculture sector of any nation globally. The direction that the sector takes will be determined by the individual decisions taken by farm business managers, responding to market signals.' said Mick Keogh.

The contributors to the Summer 2011 *Farm Policy Journal* are:

- Mick Keogh, Food security, food reality, and Australian agricultural opportunity
- Wallace E Tyner, A broad perspective on biofuels and agriculture
- Al Mussell, Feed grains and livestock in Canada: a reconciliation
- Nicolette Cameron, John Ralph Essay Competition winner, Agriculture and energy, a growing challenge in the world and in Australia
- Robert Johnstone with the supervision of Donald Cameron, The emerging complementary and competitive tension between agriculture and energy.

The Summer 2011 quarter *Farm Policy Journal* is available online at the Australian Farm Institute website www.farminstitute.org.au or by phoning (02) 9690 1388.

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