

# AUSTRALIAN FARM INSTITUTE

## MEDIA RELEASE



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### Digital literacy the key to agtech adoption

#### DIGITAL FARMERS: BRINGING AGTECH TO LIFE this June

If the unconstrained implementation of digital technology could [boost the value of Australian agriculture by 25%](#) – a \$20.3 billion increase from 2014–15 GVP – why is Australia not adopting agtech at a faster rate?

As industry looks for ways to grow Australia's agricultural production by 67 per cent to [\\$100B by 2030](#), the target set by the National Farmers' Federation and backed by Agriculture Minister David Littleproud, digital agriculture provides a pathway to accelerating productivity. Yet the Accelerating Precision Agriculture to Decision Agriculture (P2D) research project found that producers are still not clear on the value in or methods of implementing agtech systems. Connectivity is an obvious issue, but the constraints on adoption also included lack of digital literacy, support and realisation of data value.

Having explored 'Digital Disruption in Agriculture' in 2016 and 'Harvesting the Benefits of Digital Agriculture' in 2017, the Australian Farm Institute (AFI) is addressing some of these issues at **Digital Farmers: Bringing AgTech to Life** in June. The AFI's 2018 annual conference will focus on the fundamental enabler in the agtech revolution: people.

The Digital Farmers program will examine the impact of digital agriculture adoption on people both within the sector and in the broader community, and the influence people are having on development and use of agtech. More than [25 speakers are confirmed](#) for seven panels and two keynote addresses, representing farmers, community leaders, students, workers, business managers, technology developers, communicators and advocates.

Digital agriculture is evolving so quickly that many farmers find it to be a confusing space where the implementation pathway is anything but clear. In addition, new skills are needed at all levels of on- and off-farm employment to utilise the available – and future – technology.

At Digital Farmers, a panel focused on **farmers** will investigate what support is available to provide farmers with the confidence and incentive to participate in digital agriculture. Panelists include: **Dave Brownhill** of Merrilong Pastoral Company, who farms 9800 hectares at Spring Ridge, NSW; **Emma Leonard**, a PhD candidate, University of New England and editor of Precision Ag News; **David Jochinke**, President of the Victorian Farmers Federation and Vice President of the National Farmers Federation; and **Dr Kate Devitt**, Research Associate at Queensland University of Technology, a philosopher and cognitive scientist. The session will address ways to overcome the barriers to the adoption of digital agricultural technologies, the trustworthiness of autonomous systems, information dissemination and on-farm experiences.

As technology becomes more specialised the traditional role of farm workers is also changing. The demand for a trained digital farm workforce requires the provision of relevant training with clear objectives targeted to the modern student and employer. A session on **farm workers** will ask: is our rural workforce evolving along with new technology? Covering this topic will be: **Matt Notley**, Lecturer of Precision Agronomy at Tocal College; **Dr Amy Cosby**, Senior Research Officer, Central Queensland University; and **Andrew Fowler**, Chairman of Nuffield Australia, who farms with his family outside Esperance in Western Australia. This session will discuss methods to increase technology adoption across the supply chain to ensure the agricultural workforce will be confident and skilled in the use of the latest tools and systems.

The education, training and research environment must also adapt to accommodate digital agriculture. A session focused on **students** will include presentations from: **Prof. David Lamb**, Precision Agriculture Research Group UNE, who leads the University of New England's SMART Farm project and the Precision Agriculture Research Group (UNE-PARG); **Prof. Ian Yule**, Precision Agriculture, Massey University; and **Prof. Alexander McBratney**, Director of the Sydney Institute of Agriculture. Facilitator **Anna Speer**, CEO of AuctionsPlus, will challenge the speakers on whether educational institutions are producing the graduates that agribusiness will need in the next decade.

Additional sessions across the two-day program will cover **communicators, communities, technology developers** and **consumers**. The opening address will be delivered by Matthew Pryor, Chair of Rocket Seeder, and the dinner address will be delivered by Mick Keogh, outgoing Executive Director of the AFI, on the changes the agricultural sector has seen in the past 15 years - and is likely to see in the next 15.

**Digital Farmers: Bringing AgTech to Life** will be held on 13–14th June at Doltone House on Jones Bay Wharf in Pyrmont, Sydney, with a gala dinner at the Maritime Museum. Tickets & more details are available from [www.farminstitute.org.au](http://www.farminstitute.org.au).

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