

# AUSTRALIAN FARM INSTITUTE

## MEDIA RELEASE



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### Agtech closing the urban/rural divide

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

Much is made of the 'urban/rural divide' when discussing agricultural policy, but two digital trends have the potential to close some of the gaps between city and country.

The first is the agtech start-up boom, a trend which is bringing mathematicians and venture capitalists to paddocks and farmers into computer labs. The second is online retailing, which is building relationships between producers and consumers beyond the transactional.

Having explored 'Digital Disruption in Agriculture' in 2016 and 'Harvesting the Benefits of Digital Agriculture' in 2017, the Australian Farm Institute (AFI) is exploring these trends at [Digital Farmers: Bringing AgTech to Life](#). 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.

While farmers and farm workers look for options to improve their digital literacy, opportunities for start-ups and technology developers are bringing new groups of people to agriculture. **Digital Farmers** will explore what agricultural communities are doing to make the most of this influx of knowledge, and examine whether the technology community understands the cultural barriers to agtech uptake, in a session focused on **technology developers**. This panel will include **Doug Fitch**, CEO of [Agworld](#); **Carolynne James**, DPI's GATE Project Leader, and **Sarah Nolet**, CEO of [AgThentic](#) and a board member of the [Future Farmers Network](#).

"The potential to explore mutual benefits in these new business relationships is already having a positive impact on the ag landscape," said AFI Executive Director Richard Heath.

Mr Heath noted that the prevalence of agtech start-ups, with their focus on ground-truthing their ideas on-farm, helped to erode the "us and them" mentality often seen in business.

"The knowledge base and left-of-field ideas that developers are bringing to agriculture can enable some really innovative solutions. At the same time, the experience and understanding of the complexity of primary production that farmers are sharing with developers is ensuring that solutions are practical and useful. It's a win-win."

All agricultural produce eventually ends up the hands of a consumer, and digital agriculture is building new pathways from farms to consumers.

"Evidence of provenance is increasingly important, and digital platforms have a big role to play in this," said Mr Heath.

"The application of technology such as blockchain has matured quickly to encompass supply chain integrity as much as payment improvements and financial transparency."

Technology is also increasingly used to create food, not just produce it. The final session of **Digital Farmers** will look at how digital agriculture is changing the retail relationship.

Addressing this topic are [2017 Nuffield Scholar Lara Ladyman](#), a director of her family's 5680-hectare diversified cropping and livestock business in Western Australia, and **James Hutchinson & Tyler Ye**, founders of [James Tyler Fine Foods](#). Lara, James and Tyler will discuss the dramatic changes predicted to occur throughout the food production chain over the next two decades, the booming Daigou, eCommerce and O2O channels in China, and the human capital needed to support these shifts.

Additional sessions across the two-day program will cover **farmers, students, farm workers, communicators** and **rural communities**. 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 topic: **Will future agriculture still need people?**

**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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