



## Farm Policy Journal – Feb Quarter 2006

### Agricultural R&D – Policy at the Cross-Roads

An increasing focus on the security of Intellectual Property rights generated from agricultural research, combined with continuing real declines in public funding of agricultural research and development is leading to reduced public investment in agricultural research in Australia.

The February 2005 edition of the *Farm Policy Journal* will contain papers written by Australian and international authors exploring whether this trend is inevitable and whether the private sector should be provided with greater encouragement to commercialise agricultural innovations.

Contributors include:

- Professor Frank Scrimgeour (University of Waikato Management School, NZ)
- Huijie Zhang (CAAS, China), Keming Qian (CAAS, China) & Shenggen Fan (IFPRI)
- Julian Alston (University of California Davis, US) & Phillip Pardey (University of Minnesota, US)

## 2005 Strategic Roundtable Conference

The Australian Farm Institute's Strategic Roundtable Conference was held in Sydney on 21 and 22 November 2005. The 60 participants included a variety of Australian agribusiness and pastoral company leaders, academics, rural consultants and Australian Farm Institute staff.



1. (L to R) 1. Di Bentley, Natural Resource Commission, Professor Margaret Alston, Charles Sturt University, Dr John Keniry, Board member, Australian Farm Institute. 2. Jock Whittle, National Australia Bank and John Dalton, DAFF.



In his closing summary the Institute's Research Advisory Committee Chairman, John Kennedy highlighted the key issues arising from the open forum discussions. They included the related challenges of the perception of agriculture amongst the wider community, and the challenges the sector faces in attracting high quality human resources.



Above: (Left to Right) Ken Matthews, Chairman, National Water Commission, Mick Keogh, Executive Director, Australian Farm Institute and John Ralph, Chairman, Australian Farm Institute, Sofitel Wentworth Hotel, Sydney.

The increasing concerns of the community about natural resource management also became evident, especially in the open forum following the presentation by Ken Matthews, Chairman of the National Water Commission.

Presentations made by Don Mackay (AACo), Margaret Alston (CSU) and Ross Kingwell (UWA & WA Dept of Ag) also stimulated keen discussion covering a variety of issues that are currently affecting agriculture and that will shape the sector in the future. Dr Susan Nelle, Managing Director of the National Food Industry Strategy was the Conference dinner speaker.

The key issues arising from the conference will form the basis for the 2006/07 Research Program. The Institute's Research Advisory Committee will meet in late February to formulate a portfolio of proposed research projects to be presented recommended to the Institute's Board.

For more information about the Conference and other Institute events go to [www.farminstitute.org.au/News\\_and\\_Events](http://www.farminstitute.org.au/News_and_Events) or contact the Institute on 61 2 9690 1388.



## Contract Agriculture Research Report

The Research Project addressing vertical contracting in Australian agriculture and the implications of emerging trends for farmers and policy-makers has now been completed. The report is due to be released in the first quarter of 2006.

The report, compiled by ACIL Tasman Pty Ltd, reveals increased contracting by farmers with input suppliers and product buyers, especially in the horticultural and meat industries, although interest is also growing with selected broadacre crop products. They state that the changes will not suit everybody, but many farmers – especially large and efficient operators able to deliver to increasingly differentiated and environmentally responsible specifications stand to gain significantly from these developments.

There are a number of policy options, but the key requirement is for governments to ensure that choices of transaction type are being made in a competitively neutral atmosphere, a requirement that should prompt reviews of some existing marketing and research levy legislation.

## Corporate Membership

The Australian Farm Institute would like to welcome Case New Holland (CNH) as a new Corporate Sponsor. CNH is a world leader in the fields of agricultural and construction equipment. Supported by 11,400 dealers in 160 countries, CNH brings together the knowledge and heritage of its Case and New Holland brands with the strength and resources of its worldwide commercial, industrial, product support and finance organisations.

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## Institute Publications

Back copies of all Institute Publications are available for purchase including all editions of the *Farm Policy Journal* and Research Reports. Current Members are able to access hardcopies these publications at a discounted rate (Journal \$27.50 incl. GST; Research Report \$44 incl. GST). Please contact the Institute if you are interested in purchasing any publications.

## 2005/06 Research Program Update

### Gender Imbalance in Regional Australia

The key focus of the research project will be to conduct a preliminary analysis of the apparent growing gender imbalance in regional Australia. Initially the research will clarify the available data in order to develop a clearer understanding of trends in gender ratios in human populations in areas of regional Australia. Discussions are continuing with potential co-funders.

## Customer-Focused Australian Agriculture

This research project proposes to improve the understanding of global markets for farm produce by providing a broad overview of global markets, and the market developments that require a response by Australian agriculture.

Dr. Selwyn Heilbron of SG Heilbron Pty. Ltd. has been commissioned to carry out the research project. Co-funders of the project include the National Food Industry Strategy and Elders Limited.

## Improved Environmental Regulation

The research project is intended to compare and contrast relevant regulatory processes that are used in differing jurisdictions internationally, with the aim of developing a preferred or model set of guidelines for use in Australia, and specifically for regulatory measures that deal with on-farm management of natural resources.

The research project is being co-funded by Land & Water Australia who are also managing the project tender process.

## Productivity Growth in Australian Agriculture

This research project will compare relative rates of productivity growth in specific sectors of agriculture in Australia with rates of productivity growth observed in comparable sectors of agriculture in other countries, as a first step in considering future rural research and development policy.

Dr. John Mullen from the NSW Department of Primary Industries is the consultant commissioned to conduct the research. The Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, Meat & Livestock Australia and the Grains Research & Development Corporation have provided co-funding for the project.

For further information go to [www.farminstitute.org.au/research](http://www.farminstitute.org.au/research)

## Out and About

The Institute's Executive Director, Mick Keogh will be speaking at several events in the coming months. He will firstly be addressing the annual Rural Press editors conference in Sydney and will then speak at the Marcus Oldham College Corporate Agriculture Workshop in early February. Mick will be attending the AARES conference from February 8-10 where he will present a paper on the future of Australian agriculture in a services dominated economy. In March Mick will also speak at the Queensland Farmers' Federation annual conference.

The Australian Farm Institute will be attending the 2006 ABARE Outlook Conference in Canberra from February 28 to March 1 and will also have an exhibitors stand.

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### Australian Farm Institute

Suite 73, 61 Marlborough Street, Surry Hills NSW 2010  
T 61 2 9690 1388 F 61 2 9699 7270  
E [info@farminstitute.org.au](mailto:info@farminstitute.org.au) W [www.farminstitute.org.au](http://www.farminstitute.org.au)

The NSW Farmers' Association is the founding member and principal supporter of the Australian Farm Institute.