

**21 June 2010**

## **If I were the Minister for Agriculture... Competition winners announced!**

In early 2010, the Australian Farm Institute opened its Farm Policy Journal to farmers and agribusiness, giving two people the opportunity to have their policy ideas printed in the May quarter edition. Given that 2010 is an election year, the competition provided a great opportunity for all armchair agricultural policy-makers to have their views heard and put in front of politicians at a critical time. The Federal Minister for Agriculture was one of the judges considering the entries.

The winners are Bruce Currie, a Queensland cattle farmer who puts a strong emphasis on sustainable production, and Peter Mahony, a beef cattle farmer who has recently moved his young family to France to develop some of the ideas touched on in his paper.

Peter Mahony's paper focuses on three main issues, which are sustainability, generational change, and incentivising individuals. He proposes the development of a cooperative approach to tackle soil degradation whereby local cooperatives operating with joint industry-government funding are established to reverse soil degradation at the regional level.

Bruce Currie highlights the perception gap that exists between urban and rural Australians about agriculture as an important issue to tackle. He proposes to do this via education programs that include initiatives such as providing incentives for urban students to have a 'gap' year working in rural areas. He also stresses the need for increased rural research and development, which he proposes should occur via a diversion of funding from regional natural resource management bodies to the employment of technical specialists such as agronomists, veterinarians and biologists.

The entries were judged by the following panel members:

- The Hon Tony Burke MP, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
- Richard Bolt, Secretary Victorian Department of Primary Industries
- Dr Linda Botterill, Director of the National Institute for Rural and Regional Australia, Fellow Political Science Program the Australian National University
- Dr Julianne Schultz AM is the founding editor of Griffith REVIEW and Professor in the Centre for Public Culture and Ideas at Griffith University

The authors of the two winning entries received a cash prize of \$500, and a complimentary one year full membership to the Australian Farm Institute (valued at \$275). Peter Mahony and Bruce Currie's papers will be included in the May 2010 quarter Farm Policy Journal, along with papers from researchers and economists.

"The value in each of these papers lies in their emphasis on different aspects of agricultural policy, which serves as a reminder of the complexity of the sector, and the challenges associated with bringing about change," said Mick Keogh, Executive Director of the Australian Farm Institute.

"The three issues that seem to attract most attention are the need for enhanced research and development, the need for a better funded and more comprehensive approach to natural resource management, and a focus on the 'people' issues. None of these are easy areas in which to bring about change, but all are issues about which there is strong agreement change is needed."

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