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the facts are not the story

do community perceptions of Australian agriculture really matter?

John Ralph Essay Competition 2013

Matthew Cawood
Xi Yu
John J Keily
Anna Campbell
Lucy Broad
Jessica Fleetwood

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Mick Keogh
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This Summer 2013 edition of the *Farm Policy Journal* contains the winning entries and the leading contenders in the 2013 John Ralph Essay Competition conducted by the Australian Farm Institute. The topic for essays in this year's competition was: Do community perceptions of Australian agriculture really matter?

This year's topic was perhaps somewhat more 'exotic' than a topic on issues such as trade or economic policy, as addressing it required consideration of some matters normally more relevant to social scientists than agricultural scientists. It was perhaps no surprise that most entries for the competition were from people involved in communications and the media, rather than economists or scientists.

The three competition judges (AFI Chairman David Anthony, AFI Research Committee Chairman Professor Ross Kingwell, and AFI Executive Director Mick Keogh) were provided with anonymous copies of the entries, and required to judge them against a set of criteria. Reaching agreement on the winning entries was particularly challenging given the quality of the entries, and necessitated several meetings before the two winning entries were finally agreed upon.

Many of the entries received canvassed familiar themes. The recent live cattle exports suspension was frequently referenced as evidence of the fracture between Australian agriculture and the non-agricultural community. Most recognised that Australia is no longer riding on the sheep's back and that most in the community have little or no connection with agriculture. A few authors were unimpressed about the lack of agricultural knowledge in the community, but most recognised that efforts need to be made to address this, rather than simply criticise urban agricultural ignorance. Many entrants in the competition attempted to discuss the nature of these perceptions and put forward interesting ideas – ideas to shape urban perceptions without negatively judging their city cousins.

This is possibly one of the biggest challenges involved in the issue of community perceptions. People with great knowledge and daily experience of agriculture need to accept that an 'untruth' or 'misrepresentation' can shape public decision-making, even though it seems ridiculous to those involved in the industry.

The winning entry was submitted by Matthew Cawood. Matthew has been a journalist for Fairfax Agriculture Media for almost 15 years. He is also directly involved in agriculture, having grown up on a cattle property and currently working from a small farm in northern New South Wales. His take on the topic was clear and efficient: research has shown that perceptions, true or false, shape human decisions and are shaped by emotional feelings. For Matthew, the farming sector would gain much more from touching the emotions of Australians instead of trying to convince them they are wrong by reciting facts.

Lauren (Xi) Yu was the winner of the student prize. She is originally from China and her

perspective on this topic is both refreshing and enlightening. In her experience and that of her friends and family in China, Australian agricultural products have awesome qualities, being regarded as safe and of consistent quality. She found it surprising that the Australian community is generally critical of its agriculture sector, given the esteem with which Australian farmers are held in her home country. Lauren also recognises similarities between the Australian and Chinese communities, in that both are increasingly losing connection with the agricultural sector. She suggests solving this by targeting the young generation through the mediums they use, including advertising and social media. Lauren believes that advertising can improve the visibility of agriculture, and social media competitions can engage the younger generation.

John Keily's essay takes us through the history of Australian community perceptions toward agriculture. It's very useful to remember that negative perceptions toward the trade of livestock started as early as 1886 when petitions were signed to remove a saleyard from what is now the heart of Melbourne. This perspective shows that if the weight of opinion has now fallen on the side of those with more sensitivity towards the environment and animal welfare it is urgent to address their concerns. John's focus is on the creation of an overarching national narrative coordinated by a strong peak organisation.

Anna Campbell's essay is a very well structured and a pragmatic call to action. Her first recommendation appears to perfectly express what many of the other essays suggest: 'Australian agriculture across the board needs to take responsibility for the Australian community and their perceptions.' Anna states that studies have shown that, in response to some recent decisions by the Australian Government and retailers, Australians don't necessary hold a grudge against the farming sector. The farming sector shouldn't be complacent but doesn't necessarily need to react defiantly.

Lucy Broad, with very strong experience in professional communication within the agricultural sector, brings a range of interesting facts to the table. Various recent surveys have shown that behind the apparent negativity toward the farming sector, farmers remain a very trusted profession, and that it is not too late for agriculture to regain a strong social license and support. According to her essay, Australian community views and perceptions remain a matter for research and discussion. Australian consumers may be much more open to modern agriculture than is depicted by current trends.

Jessica Fleetwood, an entry in the student category, puts the emphasis on the impact negative perceptions of the agricultural sector may have on the industry through a decrease in student numbers interested in agricultural careers. Jessica believes that promotion of the agriculture industry will encourage young people to consider the viability of careers in the sector. Career advisers in secondary schools across rural and urban areas need to advocate agriculture as a prosperous industry, offering a myriad of career options.

Most of the essays that made it to the final round are published in this edition of the *Farm Policy Journal.* All of the essays could not be published in this edition, but some of the common ideas in them are worthy of mention. Many essays started from the premise that the strongest connection between the Australian community and agriculture is through food. This observation led to the conclusion that food should be the entry point of any narrative of Australian farming.

A common conclusion arising from many of the essays was that Australian children and consumers need to know where their food comes from to be able to relate to agriculture. Finding ways to achieve this remains the sector's biggest challenge.

The Australian Farm Institute wishes to thank all those who took the time to enter the 2013 John Ralph Essay Competition.

Do Community Perceptions of Australian Agriculture Really Matter?

Matthew Cawood

Journalist, Fairfax Agricultural Media
'Old Dyamberin', Wongwibinda, New South Wales

John Ralph Essay Competition Winner, Professional Category

Facts are Only Part of the Story

Those who speak for agriculture have long prided themselves in presenting 'the facts'. Usually those doing the speaking are farmers who deal in the verities of life, death and fertiliser. They expect that audiences will respond to a truth expressed in facts.

But human truth is all a matter of perception, and perception doesn't just deal in facts.

When a team led by American neuroscientist Sam Harris examined the human brain's reactions to fact and belief, it discovered something that says much about whether perceptions matter.

Our brain apparently doesn't much care for scientific veracity: it is capable of accepting facts and beliefs alike as true, in the same way, and mixing them into one often-perplexing worldview.

Harris and colleagues determined this by measuring brain activity while they presented a series of statements to a group of committed Christians, and a group of equally committed atheists (Harris et al. 2009).

When the Christians were given a belief statement like 'Jesus Christ really performed the miracles attributed to him in the Bible', part of their brain lit up. It was the same part – the ventromedial prefontal cortex – that lit up when atheists were given a fact statement like 'Alexander the Great was a famous military leader.'

It seems, Harris told *Newsweek* in 2009, that to the brain, facts and human values are inseparable. 'We seem to be doing the same thing when we accept a proposition about God or the virgin birth as we do about astronomy.' (*Newsweek* 2009)

Facts, cherished as the final arbiter of truth, apparently do not much matter. We meld fact and fiction alike into something we call reality.

This is the process that shapes perceptions of agriculture. It helps explain why those perceptions can run in confusing cross-currents, and why when it comes to shaping perception, facts are only part of the story.

Perceptions Shape Agriculture

Farmers enjoy a high reputation in the community. In the *Readers Digest Australia's Most Trusted Professions 2013* survey, farmers' 10th ranking was only bettered by professions with people's lives directly in their hands: firefighters, doctors, pharmacists (*Reader's Digest Australia* 2013).

What have farmers done to deserve their reputation, as opposed to soldiers (12th), flight attendants (17th) or plumbers (28th)? Without disparaging farmers, it is likely that this ranking is more perception than hard data. Relatively few farmers now have a direct connection with the public. At a remove, farming carries a folk memory of honest sons of the soil – a concept reinforced by retail advertising. This shapes a cultural lens through which farmers are seen in a generous light.

Animal welfare activism puts a different gloss on farming. In this view, the inhuman rigidity of factory farming stamps out humanity toward animals. Persistent, hard-nosed campaigning by

the animal welfare lobby has changed regulations and industries. The ratio of free-range eggs to caged eggs sold in Australia is now 13% higher than a decade ago. (As this essay was being finalised, Woolworths announced plans to phase out sales of all caged eggs by 2018.) Despite lengthy resistance from within the wool industry to anti-mulesing campaigns, nearly 10% of Merino wool now comes from non-mulesed flocks, and pain relief is used on about 14% of lambs who are mulesed.

These and other trends, initiated by relatively small numbers of people, promise to have considerable momentum.

> [I]n the UK, almost 70% of consumers claim to buy free-range eggs 'always or often'; a German study of chicken consumers found 59% expressed an interest in buying chicken from higher welfare systems with a further 82% of these willing to pay more for it; and in France, the market for higher welfare Label Rouge chicken in the whole chicken market was over 62% in 2006.
>
> (Amos & Sullivan 2012)

Concepts of good farming versus bad farming – concepts seldom determined by farmers – are being embedded through all levels of society.

Chipotle Scarecrow is a new iOS game developed in a collaboration between Moonbot Studios and Chipotle Mexican Grill:

> An adventure game that takes place in a world where the evil Crow Foods, a stand-in for factory farms, has a monopoly on food production. You play as the Scarecrow as he tries to keep his fresh vegetables safe, move confined animals to open pastures, plant diverse crops, and feed better food to the people living in City of Plenty.
>
> (Keller 2013)

This sort of good/bad farming message takes a different hue in other areas, like the burgeoning Chinese food market. Australia, a high-cost producer, has a competitive advantage in its reputation for 'clean green' quality food, which is being deployed in a market weary of food contamination scares.

Whether Australian food in China is cleaner and greener than food from Vietnam will seldom matter, so long as the Chinese consumers are convinced of its worth in their flight from pollution.

The agriculture industry is being shaped by perceptions in other important ways.

The Australian community has repeatedly told pollsters that it supports farmers – but that same public doesn't want to actually work in farming.

Agriculture's labour shortages are well documented. More troubling is long-term brain drain, which can't be quickly reversed. In 2012, there were 700 agricultural graduates to fill about 4000 jobs (Preiss 2013). Conversely, in 2013 there

are expected to be 580 dentistry graduates jostling for 250 places.

Worldwide, the glamour professions like medicine, law and more recently, computer science are attracting the brightest youth (Top Universities 2013). Perceptions of these professions have been boosted by high-rating television dramas and feature films that present the work of doctors and lawyers as aspirational. Computer geeks, of course, can get phenomenally rich. Farming appears to offer neither fame, fortune or glamour.

If Australian graduates regard agriculture with caution, they are more open to it than Australian investors. The major property transactions of the past few years have involved overseas money.

Tim Hornibrook, joint chief executive of Macquarie Agricultural Funds Management, offered a reason for this phenomenon to *The Australian* newspaper:

> When you talk to institutional investors in Australia about the merits of investing into agriculture, their response is that you are the same people that have been telling us for so long what a terrible sector it is. It is hard to argue with them. (White 2013)

There are large sectors of Australian agriculture driven by pragmatic economics – commodity wheat exports, for instance – but look behind the economics of most agricultural products, and

perception is almost always at work. The world is full of trade barriers erected for political reasons.

Building Perceptions of Agriculture

Perceptions shape agricultural markets, regulation and investment. It is a failing, although understandable, that the agriculture sector itself does little to actively shape these perceptions by telling its own stories.

How farmers, and agriculture, are perceived in the community is largely transmitted through third parties – advertising by retailers and input manufacturers, activists, the media. In turn, much of the activity of these third parties is influenced by consumer sentiment. Agriculture itself is mostly passive in this swapping of narratives.

Allowing agriculture's identity to be presented secondhand means that much of the depth, breadth and opportunity of the industry is lost. Not controlling its own story also makes agriculture politically weak. The community does not have a clear idea of the industry's varied roles, its importance, and the imperatives that drive it, but community ideals drive political decision-making.

On the rare occasions that agriculture seeks to directly influence other sectors of society, its spokespeople assume the primacy of fact. Lay out a factual argument, the logic goes, and opinion will inevitably follow.

This thinking frequently fails. During discussion of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan, different sides wielded different facts, or different interpretations of the facts, to the point of impasse. An overwhelming body of factual evidence has been unable to persuade most Australians that anthropogenic climate change is a reality.

Facts are essential, but to be effective in shaping perceptions they must be employed in a device that wraps them in a framework of human meaning.

Apple, which has just overtaken Coca Cola as the world's most valuable brand, rarely mentions product specifications in its advertising. You don't learn that the iPhone has two gigabytes of RAM: you learn that it can change your life in several novel ways. With an iPhone, Apple suggests, you can find new layers of meaning. The 'spec wars' are left to other handset makers.

> We are 'meaning-seeking creatures'. We have imagination and this leads us to wonder about the larger context in which our lives exist. This can lead us into existential despair and since the beginning of human culture we have constructed stories that place us in a larger setting, and thus give us the sense that our lives have meaning. 'Reality leaves a lot to the imagination', to quote John Lennon, and these stories resolve the contradiction between these different types of human experience, providing our lives with a metanarrative to explain them that is integral to all human societies; this role is now performed by brands. (Yakob 1997)

Brand Agriculture

The human desire for meaning is well understood by brand-builders. Businesses like Red Bull, Apple, Nike and Starbucks produce nothing essential, yet through a potent mix of good product design and myth-making they have built great companies. These brands 'enable us to make sense and create meanings for ourselves in the social world of consumption in which we participate' (Duckworth 1996).

Making sense and creating meaning of its brand (a term used here for the sake of convenience) would help put Australian agriculture in a position of significantly greater strength. Developing an identity more accessible and appealing than a set of statistics will provide a platform, now almost entirely absent, through which to appeal for greater recruitment and investment, and give the industry added weight in political debate.

Agriculture is too complex and diverse to be a brand in the conventional sense, but it can borrow some of the brand-builders' techniques.

Ty Montague of the *co:collective* branding consultancy has coined an awkward term, 'storydoing', for companies like Red Bull that 'advance their narrative with action' (Montague 2013). As a range of third parties are ready to advance agriculture's narrative with their own action, this seems to be a prudent model to proactively adopt.

Montague lists a sequence of attributes for a storydoing brand:

- They have a story.
- The story is about a larger ambition to make the world or people's lives better.
- The story is understood and cared about by senior leadership outside of marketing.
- That story is being used to drive tangible action throughout the company: product development, human resources policies, compensation.
- These actions add up to a cohesive whole.
- Customers and partners are motivated to engage with the story and are actively using it to advance their own stories.

Agriculture's story is easy to summarise, and to sympathise with: producer of food and fibre to keep the nation fed, clothed and healthy; steward of the land for future generations; the social lifeblood of vast tracts of Australia outside the capital cities.

However, the fourth and fifth points in Montague's list present substantial hurdles to developing agriculture-as-brand.

A company is a cohesive entity, with the same values operating across business divisions. Agriculture is a collection of small businesses with values that run the full gamut of the values

chart. Any agency presuming to speak for the entire agricultural sector is going to run into dissent.

Imagining agriculture as a brand, though, it is possible to see universal values that accord with social trends, and with agriculture's long-term viability. Agriculture should, for instance, aspire to continuous improvements in animal welfare, a constant shrinking of its environmental footprint, a reinvigoration of rural communities, and to deliver delight to consumers.

These are commonsense ambitions across all agricultural sectors – so why not present them as part of agriculture's story? Rather than just being straightforward business goals, they become part of agriculture's myth.

The hard bit: if any agricultural entity violates the values of the brand, they would have to be publicly denounced by the brand's guardians (see below) – otherwise the brand immediately loses credibility. If a feedlot was found to be mistreating animals, for instance, 'Brand Agriculture' would be obliged to actively condemn the feedlot's actions.

This could be extremely difficult – but the degree of difficulty would be inversely proportional to the degree of credibility gained by agriculture as a whole if it was seen to be supporting community values against its own internal transgressions.

In time, the realisation that violating Brand Agriculture's values would, at best, get no support from within industry, and at worst invite condemnation from it, might be an extra incentive for operators to abide by a code of conduct.

> [I]f I were trying to invent a mythic brand, I'd want to be sure that there was a story, not just a product or a pile of facts. That story would promise (and deliver) an heroic outcome. (Godin 2006)

Building the Brand

Creating a structure to support and promote Brand Agriculture will be no small feat: this is an industry where people can quarrel over the need for investment in basic research and development.

Ideally, brand development would be seen as an extension activity – not extension inwards to members of a farming sector, but extension outwards to the wider community: a long-term investment in community goodwill, recruitment, political capital and new sources of financial capital.

In this light, it might be financially possible to have one member of each agricultural Research and Development Corporation (RDC) board be a Brand Agriculture specialist. These individuals would be chosen as creatives able to pick out the brand narrative of each sector: the story it needs to tell.

That information could be conveyed to board chairs, to be incorporated into public statements; to those producing publicity material on behalf of the sector; broadcast through social media and conventional media; and delivered to producers, who can adopt the story in their own thinking.

The information would also flow up to a peak Brand Agriculture body, on which all the RDC creatives would sit along with a media-friendly chair and spokesperson. The spokesperson, perhaps operating out of the National Farmers' Federation, would be the public face of agriculture as a whole – ideally, more public than its political leaders, who are often obliged to convey an unpopular message.

In crisis, a sector would channel much of its communications through Brand Agriculture – for instance, to reinforce how far removed the problem is from the sector's aspirations, and how the sector is getting back on track.

Funding could be drawn from RDC extension budgets and sponsorships. Budgets would inevitably be tight, and large splashy advertising campaigns difficult – unless the industry or a sector believed enough in the value of a campaign to fund it.

The aftermath of the 2011 live cattle export suspension is an example of a critical point where an industry sector might invest in shoring up public goodwill as the most effective means of shoring up political support. Currently there is no mechanism to allow this.

Persuading the agriculture industry that it needed something like Brand Agriculture would be challenging, but it could be the first test of the concept. Farmers and other players in agriculture need to be engaged by the story the brand wants to convey: getting that engagement from cynical levy-payers is likely to be the harshest test of the process.

Conclusion

Perceptions matter. Perceptions are not shaped by facts, but by stories that help people frame their lives with meaning. Agriculture as a whole has lost control of its story, handing its telling off to third parties – even if some agricultural enterprises are making an outstanding job of crafting their individual narratives.

Taking control of its own myth – why it exists, how it contributes to society, its internal laws – could help agriculture regain a place in the affections of the community that it has not occupied for decades. Being recognised as being an intrinsic part of people's lives, and the life of the nation, would make the industry more attractive to people and capital, and establish a more sympathetic environment in which to respond to critics and shape political debate.

> Reason is the natural order of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning. (CS Lewis)

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About the Author

Matthew Cawood grew up among 6000 cattle in Western Australia, on an AACo property managed by his father. He worked around Australia as stockman and machinery operator until his mid-twenties, when he took up journalism and began writing for a range of domestic and overseas publications. He has written on agriculture for Fairfax Agricultural Media (and its predecessor, Rural Press) since 2000. He lives and works from a small farm in New England, where he runs a hatful of breeding cows and a lot of uninvited wallabies.

Do Community Perceptions of Australian Agriculture Really Matter?

Xi Yu

Student, University of Queensland

John Ralph Essay Competition Winner, Student Category

Introduction

Agriculture as defined in Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification is:

> The Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing Division includes units mainly engaged in growing crops, raising animals, growing and harvesting timber, and harvesting fish and other animals from farms or their natural habitats. The division makes a distinction between two basic activities: production and support services to production. Included as production activities are horticulture, livestock production, aquaculture, forestry and logging, and fishing, hunting and trapping.
>
> (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2013a)

As an international student coming from China to study agriculture in one of the best universities in Australia, what I have seen and learnt about Australian agriculture is a bit different from what I thought it would be before I arrived in this great country.

Back at home, agricultural products coming from Australia represent top quality that is perceived as free from pollution and extremely natural. I have seen people happy to pay A$80 for one serve of grass-fed beef eye fillet, A$10 for a Calypso mango, A$10 for 200g of macadamia nuts in shells and many other things that are sold at a ridiculously high price. Some immoral businesses even dress up their products as 'produced in Australia' when they actually are not. Thanks to numerous recent food safety issues, the majority of Chinese people believe that everything produced outside of China is much safer than our national produce and I know the local farmers also believe so. A vegetable farmer told me they never eat food growing on their land if they use synthetic fertilisers and pesticides during production because they know the food will be polluted by chemicals and heavy metals. She even asked me to bring Australian milk powder back for her because she loves the taste and it is safe to drink. What I am trying to say here is that Australian agricultural products have a huge impact overseas in export markets. I am not sure about other countries, but at least in China, to consumers 'produced in Australia' means zero pollution, premium quality and a high price. Australian produce has a very high reputation in China and I think every Australian should be proud of that and be proud of the people who produce it.

Then here I am in Australia, where I thought agriculture would be a flourishing industry with great support from the government and lots of community understanding and appreciation. However, I found that is not quite true. Australia is such a highly urbanised country that more than 70% of the population live in major cities (ABS 2013b). The urban community does not have a great understanding of agriculture, and in the media farmers are often blamed for polluting the water sources with excess application of chemicals, or not treat their animals well enough, and there are many other arguments against agriculture. A survey conducted by Witt et al. (2009) found the majority of the urban community are sympathetic to the farming community. They are aware that environmental issues and the sustainability of current farming practices are real concerns and that it is not the responsibility of the farming community alone to improve these practices (Witt et al. 2007, 2009). I always tell people I meet in Australia that agriculture is a very fascinating sector and I am happy with what I am doing right now. They are always interested and I hear them say 'Wow, agriculture! That's really cool!', then they will ask lots of questions about what I learn and what we do. To the urban

community, their disconnection from the land makes agriculture quite mysterious, but they seem quite interested to explore the subject further. However, this may be very difficult because a lot of information is unavailable to them, which is consistent with the survey results (Witt et al. 2009). Farming does sometimes have negative impacts on the environment, and the media loves these sorts of stories, but I seldom see anything in the mainstream media with a positive view on agriculture, such as innovation in new farming technology, breeding breakthroughs, and so on.

It is common in today's society that people's first impression of agriculture is food, however it is not common to link agriculture with land and the farmers who produce food from it (Blackburn 1999). I was told many Australian kids have no idea where the apple they eat or the milk they drink comes from. This is quite common among Chinese kids as well. Some of my friends told me they thought watermelons grow on trees; they could not tell a zucchini from a cucumber without tasting them, and many other things that surprised me. I think it is definitely important to make agriculture better known by the community in order to develop a better agriculture industry in Australia. I like the saying 'If you eat, you're a partner in farming' (National Farmers' Federation 2013). More ordinary Chinese people are engaging in agriculture because they have realised that they, the consumers, although not directly involved with agricultural production, are also an important part of agriculture. There is a need to improve food quality and animal welfare in China. More and more people have realised that greater community involvement allows for a better understanding of current production methods and what makes farmers act in less sustainable ways. It also helps to solve the problems associated with pollution, animal welfare, the living standards of farming communities, education, research and development (R&D) and many aspects of agriculture. Greater understanding also provides a better chance to bring changes, improvements and opportunities to the industry as everyone has the potential to influence the agricultural industry to make it better. This is why I think the perception of the Australian community really matters. The community needs to be educated to understand what Australian farmers are doing, and what are the strengths and weaknesses of the Australian agricultural sector, so farmers can be given greater support for a better industry. It is irresponsible to say that agriculture has nothing to do with the non-farming community: as long as we eat, we are part of agriculture.

Where are the Opportunities for Australian Agriculture?

With the rising middle class in developing countries such as China and India, there is

enormous potential for Australian agricultural industries to supply the rising demand in high quality food products. At the same time, Australia can really take the advantage of the current food safety problems occurring in many Asian countries. China has a population of 1.3 billion and India 1.1 billion (ABS 2008). If we do a simple calculation, these two countries alone have a joint population of 2.4 billion and that is approximately 100 times more than the population of Australia. There is a huge market in Asia and around the world and we should let the community know there is a strong demand in supplying these markets and there is enormous potential for Australian agriculture to supply these markets. Furthermore, the opportunities exist not only for farmers who are directly involved in agricultural production; there are research, logistics, machinery, chemical, seeds,

packing, marketing and so many sectors which provide services to primary producers that will benefit from developing Australian agriculture. Different from non-renewable energy resource industries, agriculture is much more sustainable when practised in the right way. People must eat. There is always a demand, and we can supply. Australian agriculture is not an industry without hope; this is a very wrong perception held by part of the community and there is a need to change that. However, with fewer people willing to take up a job in agriculture, it is a big concern for the industry.

Current Challenges

Current challenges facing the Australian agricultural sector come from both internal and external sources. Inside the farming community, there is a trend of outflow of people and expertise – with many young people no longer wishing to stay on the farm to continue the family farming business or take up agriculture related jobs, and many agricultural experts reaching retirement age, the biggest worry is there will not be enough human resources. A recent meeting of the Australian Council of Deans of Agriculture reviewed a declining trend in agricultural graduate numbers significantly smaller than the estimated numbers of job vacancies every year. The demand for well-educated and better qualified agricultural graduates is strong now and will be in the future as well.

Education is the future of agricultural industry. A survey conducted by Miller et al. (2011) revealed the attitude of Australian university students towards agriculture careers, and in the students' minds career opportunities are still seen as the traditional fields of work that require working with animals, working with soil and protecting the environment. Very interestingly, apart from these traditional views, students have the awareness that agricultural issues are very important to society and some young people are motivated by this factor and willing to take up an agricultural career.

How to Influence Community Perceptions?

It takes time to influence community perceptions about agriculture. In this digital world, the most direct and efficient way is to use the power of media by increasing media exposure to let more people know agriculture is not only about being a farmer and enduring physical and psychological hardship. This message can be targeted at the younger generations, because they will grow up with knowledge and positive attitudes towards agriculture; if they do not know anything about agriculture, it is not a good sign to the industry or the country.

Younger generations are very attached to the digital world. As part of it, I know we could not live without our smartphones and tablets and we learn almost everything new in the digital form. Many things are available in the digital form now, including information on agriculture; however, it was only since I started to do an agricultural degree that I learnt where to locate them. Agricultural information is already available in digital forms, but the problem is that the information does not automatically jump in front of people's eyes without being searched for. Only those who are interested in agriculture or related topics will search for such information. If we can make 'agriculture' more visible, there will be more influence on the whole community. Many people relate agriculture with food because this is the only form most people can see and feel in their daily life. We tend to be influenced when we always see the same thing. This is like in advertising; if you see an advertisement several

times a day, the brand, the slogan and the product might take root in your deep consciousness. We can absolutely borrow this idea and use it for agriculture, and repeat that within the many agricultural industries there are a great range of opportunities with attractive high-status career prospects. So many things we want to let those outside agriculture know can be transferred through advertising and marketing, as well as in traditional ways such as school programs.

The first thing is to increase media exposure to let young people hear and see more about agriculture. This will not be a small investment, but the effect will be very direct. If done in an efficient and smart way, the results will be promising. Competitions can be something interesting to do, but rewards must be high enough to catch your eye. For example, there is a newly established mobile phone company in China, which held a competition last year and called for 10 high quality photographs to be used as wallpapers for their new phone. Each winner was rewarded with RMB10,000 (A$1800), which is worth three times the average monthly salary in China (*China Labour Bulletin* 2013), for just one single photograph. The company then invited the public to vote for the photographs, and in order to win, participants sent out messages to anyone they knew to vote for them. So there were a lot of news updates about this competition at that time. This is a very smart way of increasing public exposure and interest. All the company needed to do was to generate initial interest and keep people updated, so they would not easily forget and the public did the rest to make it known to more people. This is a win-win strategy, but its success was built on a few facts. Firstly, the mobile company had already built a very good reputation among young people and it was fashionable to use their phone. Secondly, the participants felt it to be an honour if their photos were chosen as wallpapers, so they were willing to get more people voting for them. Lacking a positive image and interest among young people is possibly one barrier the agriculture industry needs to overcome to attract more interest. The idea of a competition could be adopted later once there is enough curiosity being generated, otherwise it will not maximise influence.

Proposal

At the moment, we need to generate more funding for promoting agriculture to the public, especially young people. A certain percentage from the levies of each agriculture sector can be pooled together. This funding will be used to promote the image of the whole agricultural industry and not only a single sector. For people from outside of agriculture, there is no difference between animals or plants or fertilisers or harvesters; these are all agriculture, the public do not differentiate. The Australian Government Department of Agriculture should be responsible for gathering the funding by charging a small percentage of levies from each sale of animal products, pesticides, veterinary medicines, wine, forestry product, grain, sugar, horticultural products and all related sectors. Private funding support could also be attempted.

During the funding-gathering period, proposals can be called from throughout society on how to promote agriculture; they can make tablet applications, games related to agriculture, posters, photos, videos or any form of promotion they feel will be useful. This attempt not only generates good ideas, it is also a comparatively less expensive way of increasing publicity. Journalists and people working in the media industry can be invited to see the modern farming facilities, the breeding trials, how sustainable farmers are doing, the high-tech in R&D and so many other things they should see. These people will transfer what they see to the general public, so it is important to let these people understand what agriculture is and what we are doing.

With sufficient funding, the next step is to implement promotion methods and broadcast on the front page posts and advertisements on the most influential websites, on social media such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and so on. The point is to make agriculture known in a positive way by more people, especially young people. The effect will not be instant and it will take a long time to see results, perhaps quite a few years and there needs to be consistent publicity over the years, otherwise people forget easily. This cannot be a once only action.

Conclusion

Many industries have already achieved great public influence with the help of media. It is the media who gives the negative images of agriculture to the public, but the media can also help to promote the positive sides of agriculture. Agriculture should make good use of media to help influence public perceptions. Young people are the future of Australian agriculture, however, most of the younger generations do not have enough information about agriculture. The most urgent thing is to expose them more to agriculture and let them know agriculture is not only about food, but rather that food is just a very small part of agriculture. It is such a diverse industry with abundant opportunities at the global scale. There is a huge potential for Australian agriculture to supply overseas markets and there is a huge requirement in getting more human resources to build a more competitive Australian agriculture sector.

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Do Community Perceptions of Australian Agriculture Really Matter?

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This essay will demonstrate that community perceptions of agriculture have traditionally given the sector a prominent place in the psyche of all Australians. However, this essay contends that those positive perceptions have been gradually eroded and unless steps are undertaken to improve the declining image of agriculture, the so called 'social licence' of many agricultural pursuits will be seriously curtailed, if not ultimately withdrawn.

The Great Agricultural Disappearing Act

> Agriculture is a pillar of our national identity – it is personified by the inland, RM Williams boots, Akubra hats, the stockman, the jackaroo, the jillaroo, the AWU.
>
> (Barnaby Joyce, Federal Minister of Agriculture)

In 1987 one of the world's biggest livestock selling markets was closed. The reasons for its closure included the land being too valuable for its current use, with the true value realised if it were given over to housing development. That livestock market was the Newmarket Saleyards and Abattoir complex, which had been operating, since its establishment in 1856 with a Crown land grant in the heart of Melbourne. Petitions for removal of the complex had begun as early as 1886, as pressure mounted from those who perceived the trade in livestock as offensive to the senses (Museum Victoria, undated). With the final closing in 1987, livestock trading and processing, which involved transporters, agents, stockmen and suppliers, moved beyond the ken of city people forever, to be undertaken in regional selling centres and country abattoirs.

The closure of Newmarket was just one act in a long play that has been running for over a hundred years, the central theme being the disassociation of the bulk of Australia's population from its food sources, the farms of Australia. The long decline in rural populations has been well documented. In 1916 the Victorian Parliament held a committee of enquiry into the drift of rural populations to the city (Murphy 2005). Eighty years later *The Canberra Times* noted that regional populations were still shrinking and services were being cut to regional communities, many of which had lost their 'critical mass' (Brown 1999). The rationalisation of agriculture has been an ongoing process. Driven by escalating wages, increasing costs, droughts, fluctuating commodity prices, mechanisation, import competition, export market access restrictions, withdrawal of government support mechanisms and a constant striving for increased farm productivity in the face of declining terms of trade, farmer numbers have declined, properties have amalgamated and rural communities have shrunk. Farmers are continually confronted with what has been described as the Farm Productivity Dilemma (Carroll 2010). Despite sustained increases in farm production and productivity, farm profits have continued to fall in the face of the adjustment pressures.

> A significant part of our increased standard of living, better nutrition and health, even increasing life expectancy is likely to be due to the real cost of foods declining, food consuming a decreasing proportion of household expenditure, less seasonality in food availability, increased food quality and improved food safety. (Carroll 2010)

However, these benefits have come at a cost. According to Australian Bureau of Statistics (2003), the number of farming families in Australia decreased by 22% between 1986 and 2001. Today there are approximately 134,000 farm businesses in Australia and around 98% are family owned and operated. In 1901, around 14%

of Australia's population of 3.5 million worked in agricultural industries (Australian Government, undated). Today, the figure is less than 1% of a population in excess of 22 million.

The consequence of the shrinkage of agriculture in terms of the numbers who actually farm is a disconnect between Australia's heavily urbanised population and its food sources. Australia is one of the most urbanised nations in the world, with around 89% of the population living in urban environments and this has given rise to what has been described as the rural-urban gap (ABC National Radio 2011).

Australian agriculture has enjoyed a large part in the formation of Australia's national heritage and its self-image. Beginning in the 1800s with the works of literary giants such as Henry Lawson and Banjo Patterson, the myths of the outback squatter, pastoralists and 'cockies' have long been a part of Australia's historical psyche. In the 1950s it was proudly recognised that Australia 'rode on the sheep's back', such was the importance of the rural sector during the nation's development. Today's Australia's economy is a lot more diversified with mining, manufacturing and tertiary industries. Agriculture only contributes 3% of the nation's GDP, with a gross value of almost $50 billion measured at the farmgate. Support and ancillary industries raise agriculture's share of GDP to around 12%. As an export industry, agriculture shines brightly, bringing in an estimated $40 billion in foreign earnings. The question is, however, does Australia's farm sector hold the same place in the national psyche, despite being a major contributor to the national wealth? Many farmers would contend that the rural-urban gap is a symptom of the declining importance of agriculture in the thinking of average, urban Australians.

Perceptions are a very powerful aspect of the human capacity to categorise, to frame their relationships and how they experience their environments. 'Perception is a compact, immediate process dependent for its explanation upon present conditions here and now at hand.'(Judd 1909) If we accept this definition of perception and what forms it, then we accept the current state of agriculture as the sole determinant of the urban population's perception of farming and agriculture. Many would argue that this approach has strong merit. That being the case, farming and agriculture need to adopt an approach to counter the negative stories of farming which seem to dominate the contemporary media landscape. Issue such as drought, animal welfare and environmental degradation seem to constantly assail the senses through the reporting of the mass media.

A 2011 study by the Australian Council for Educational Research (2011) highlighted a large gap in the understanding, or perceptions, of primary school children about their food sources. It was reported as far afield as the United States that Australian children thought cotton came from animals and yoghurt grew on trees (*The New York Post* 2012). Those reporting on the study recognised that the urbanisation of society has caused a disconnect between the population and their food sources and a warped perception of the realities of food production (Turner & Henryks 2012). This would indicate that the old memes, such as 'Australia rides on the sheep's back', which gave positive reinforcement to the rural sector, are no longer in circulation. If that is the case, then the public's perception of agriculture and farming will be dominated by whoever dominates the mass media.

However, a curious thing has happened which suggests that this view may not be the case and that the view is simplistic. Recently, the ABC rural affairs program, Landline, aired a documentary which told the story of how animal activists illicitly gained video footage from inside a small town abattoir. The video footage was handed to the Victorian meat regulator Prime Safe, which reacted harshly and suspended the abattoir's licence. The operators were charged with animal cruelty. Although the charges were eventually dropped, the closure of the meatworks and the subsequent legal battles financially ruined the family concerned, causing extreme emotional distress to them and the local community (Landline 2013). What was curious about this case is the huge backlash against the animal activists on social media and in the mainstream media (Bolt 2013). A public fundraising exercise was mounted on behalf of the family concerned

and the response has been quite high. The public outrage that resulted from the ABC television program would indicate a high level of support for Australia's farmers and the rural industries which support them. This indicates that the historical sympathies which Australians have long held for farmers, farming and the land are still in place. A browse through a bookshop seems to reinforce this idea when one takes notice of the proliferation of contemporary authors who belong to a rural genre.

A more sophisticated explanation of how perceptions are formed would perhaps take note of the fact that all media stories of rural Australia, farms and farming, contain both explicit and implied assumptions which build a psychological framework with which urban people relate to the rural sector. 'Myth, memory, art, advertising and the media shape our perceptions and expectations of the Australian landscape.' (Robertson & Watts 1999) The most recent example of this combination of factors being used to manage public perceptions of agriculture, farms and farmers, was the 2012 American Super Bowl advertisement *God Made a Farmer*. Using a mix of sentimentality, simple imagery and a mythologised narrative, the advertisement caused an outpouring of support for American farmers which circled the globe. The United States has a similar rural-urban divide to Australia and it has long been recognised there that perceptions of agriculture, farming and farmers matter greatly (Wright, Stewart & Birkenholz 1994). The question, of course, is why these perceptions matter 'greatly', if at all.

Agriculture and by extension, individual farmers, must compete for scarce resources. These resources are in the form of natural resources – like land and water – financial resources in a competitive financial market, and human resources in a highly developed economy where comparative wages affect the availability of labour. The other important 'market place' in which Australian farmers must compete is for the attention of government, which allocates public resources for infrastructure and education, and sometimes through direct support mechanisms. The role of government in creating an economic and social framework, within which agriculture must operate, is of obvious importance. Just on the numbers alone, farming's share of political representation is going to be always small and most of society's decision-makers will have non-rural backgrounds and no first-hand experience of farming systems, or of the economic and social pressures which confront agriculture. Hence, the perceptions of farming, farmers and agriculture which urban populations carry with them into positions of power, are vitally important.

The importance of this idea was demostrated in 2011 when the then Federal Agriculture Minister, Jo Ludwig, reacted to the airing of an animal cruelty video obtained by the activist group Animals Australia and subsequently banned the export of live cattle to Indonesia. The ban was put in place despite warnings from the Minister's own department, without any industry consultation and without any apparent understanding of the short and long-term ramifications the ban would have. Relations between Australia and Indonesia were strained, northern livestock producers lost their income stream and an overstocked northern pastoral industry had to contend with a deepening drought. The animal welfare concerns which caused the ban actually resulted in a far worse animal welfare outcome than the one the ban was supposed to prevent, which was animal cruelty in foreign meat processing plants. The public perception of the live export trade was negative and reinforced by the media campaigns undertaken by animal welfare activists. 'A positive knowledge and perception about agriculture has been suggested as a prerequisite to the development of good policy decisions related to agriculture.' The 'knee jerk reaction' by the Federal Government to the accusations of animal cruelty to Australian sourced animals in an Indonesian abattoir and the heavy-handed handling of the small Victorian abattoir by bureaucrats would indicate that decision-makers are entering positions of power without the required positive knowledge and perceptions about agriculture.

A similar argument can be submitted for the state of agricultural education in Australia. In 1989, 23 universities offered agriculture related courses. In 2012, just nine Australian universities

offered any form of agricultural studies. Each year, around 4000 agriculture graduates are required to fill related positions, yet only around 300 students study agriculture annually. Even educational leaders have recognised the problem, equating it with both the rural-urban disconnect and the declining significance of agriculture and farming in the minds of the urban population (Wright, Stewart & Birkenholz 1994). The decline in the position of agriculture at the level of tertiary education in Australia has been blamed on agriculture's 'tough image', formed over many years from stories of drought, harsh industry rationalisations, rural poverty and decline (AAP General News Wire 2012). A 2007 study by Australia's Deans of Agriculture, chaired by University of Sydney Professor Les Copeland, concluded that unless the problem was addressed, agriculture would fail to keep achieving productivity increases and would not be able to address sustainability issues (Rowbotham 2008). The obvious conclusions are that agriculture is not competing successfully for a necessary share of government resources and that policy-makers do not have the requisite positive knowledge and perceptions of agriculture to identify and confront the problem without external prodding and that even external prodding has become ineffective. It's as if the importance of agriculture has disappeared from the consciousness of policy and decision-makers.

The Emergence of… Chaos!

> You must have chaos within you to give birth to a dancing star. (Nietzsche 1885)

While individual farmers grapple with the usual vagaries of climate, fluctuating terms of trade, volatile export markets and the need to remain viable, the debate about farming and food has become national and even international in terms of the focus on food security, sustainability and environmental best practices. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization carries out studies into these aspects of food and agriculture on a global scale. Australian policy-makers carry out similar studies at a national level, and policy development, attempts to create national frameworks which gel with global frameworks devoted to the notion of a common habitat burdened, in the eyes of many, with a burgeoning human population that raises question about how food production can sustainably cope with the projected demand. The public, constantly exposed to the various aspects of these debates, demands a greater say in how the shared habitat, whether it be the nation or the globe, is developed. To some extent, the debate has progressed at the macro-level, while farmers battle for survival at the micro-level. In Australia, the problem can be seen in the reduction in farmer numbers and an escalating level of farm debt.

Farmers are having to constantly battle declining terms of trade. In simple terms, it means their profitability is constantly being eroded by inflating costs, with farmgate prices being driven down, in real terms, by their own increased productivity. To continue to adjust, individual farmers need to expend large amounts of capital for property amalgamation and for the implementation of new technologies with which to take advantage of scientific developments in the fields of soil science, animal husbandry and environmental management. Even Australia's senior bankers are warning that huge capital requirements and declining terms of trade are jeopardising the future of farming in Australia. According to one senior banker, because of declining margins, property amalgamations, the loss of farmlands to urban development and national parks, the number of farm establishments declined by 50% in the 40 years to 2001. The trend is forecast to continue with a further decrease of one-third by 2020, with huge implications for rural communities and bankers (Morley 2005).

Currently, around 98% of all Australian farms are family owned and the outlook for them being able to access larger amounts of capital seems grim. Calls for foreign investment in Australian agriculture have been vociferous as a means of injecting much needed capital into Australian farm businesses. Provocatively, Australian Super Funds hold around $1.5 trillion in mixed investments. The question has been asked, why do these funds not invest more heavily in Australian agriculture and agribusiness more generally? Financial analysts argue Australian agribusinesses require a large injection of capital, but local investors

seem to shy away (Mackinna 2012). This problem does not seem to have been analysed in depth by anyone, but two obvious questions arise. Firstly, why is it that overseas agribusiness investors can see opportunities in Australia and why do local investors not invest to any meaningful extent? According to the Australian Farm Institute, conservative pension and retirement funds from abroad find Australian agribusiness an attractive investment (Keogh 2013). The obvious question is what is making Australian investors so risk adverse to investing in Australian agriculture? The answer, perhaps equally as obvious, is that local perceptions of risk are higher than those of foreign investors. Once again, it seems that perceptions of Australian agriculture are framed within a narrative that suggests the outlook is pessimistic. That shouldn't be the case, because a close look at the rates of productivity growth in agriculture shows it has generally outstripped other sectors of the economy over a long period. According to the National Farmers' Federation (2012), between the 1970s and 2003 productivity growth rates were consistent at around 2.8% annually. Only in recent times has the growth in productivity fallen towards 1% annually, reflecting a need for injections of capital for research, development and education.

One of the defining features of the rapid rationalisation of Australian agriculture has been a diversification away from the traditional bulk commodities like wheat, wool, beef and dairy production and the development of new and boutique industries like the wine industry, the fruit industry, and various others such as coffee and nuts. Along with the development of new agribusiness industries there has been a proliferation of industry representative bodies. Beginning in the mid to late 1970s, farmer representative bodies coalesced into state and national representative organisations, with the National Farmers' Federation as the peak representative body (National Farmers' Federation, undated). However, there are also peak representative bodies for each of the major farm commodities, such as beef, wheat and dairy. There has also been a proliferation of representative bodies that represent smaller industry sectors, boutique producers' groups such as irrigators and developing farm industries. Not all are affiliated with the National Farmers' Federation and in some states, Western Australia and Queensland, for example, there are multiple 'peak' representative organisations. Today, Australian farmers and producers are represented by no fewer than 4000 producer representative groups seeking to further the cause of 'farmers' (Agribusiness Council of Australia, undated).

To further add to the confusion, today we are witnessing a revolution in communication through the medium of social media (Courtney 2011). Approximately 2 million Australians use Twitter, the short message platform where communication is done at 140 characters at a time. It is guesstimated that less than 10% of farmers use it to varying degrees. Facebook is also popular and around 9 million Australians use it regularly (Godfrey 2013).

It is unknown how many farmers use Facebook, but there has been a proliferation of disparate groups ranging from the National Farmers' Federation to groups like *Ask an Aussie Farmer*, *Australian Farmers* and *Save Australian Farmers*. The phenomena has made Australian farmers and farming more visible to urban audiences, and to such an extent that some producers use social media to sell directly to the public. It is very favoured by those who see themselves as 'agvocates', trying to further the image of farmers and to transparently represent Australian agriculture. It has been observed that social media has levelled the playing field and allowed farmers to confront the enemies of farming, such as radical animal activists and environmentalists who have used the platforms to organise and communicate for a long time. The problem is, of course, that it has allowed individual farmers to operate as just that, individuals, thus adding to the 'noise' that is generated by so many who seek to represent farmers and farming. Consequently, the use of social media by the rural sector is not seen as a 'silver bullet' by professional communicators, who suggest that its use be coupled with the more traditional forms of communication (Oldfield 2013). This takes us on a circular route back to the problem of having too many representative bodies vying for the attention of the public and the attention of government decision-makers and

there is no coherency in building positive public perceptions of Australian farmers, farming and farming systems. The lack of a coherent approach to creating positive perceptions of agriculture were recognised as long ago as 1986, when *The Canberra Times* editorialised the problem by pointing out that '…regional Australia's lobbying in this regard has been mostly fragmented and parochial.' (Brown 1999)

Thus, it can be concluded that Australian's perceptions of agriculture are made difficult by the disparate voices of rural Australia that are not creating a coherent framework in which urban Australians can experience and understand agriculture. The framework contains too much chaotic and unregulated 'noise'.

Releasing a Butterfly

> At the speed of light words evaporate, leaving only images behind. (Lewis 2013)

Contemporary society is often referred to as the information society, in which the creation, distribution and manipulation of information has profound economic and social ramifications. Since the advent of the Internet and digital communications systems, information flows have developed exponentially as humans have found creative ways to harness technology for the dissemination of information. New communication paradigms have emerged and specialists have developed in the field who can create, manipulate and disseminate information to vast audiences at light speed. Tremendous economic, cultural and occupational changes have taken place throughout society. The one sector that has lagged behind is the rural sector, which is only now harnessing the true capabilities of the information technologies available. However it is not doing so in a controlled and unified manner which could positively influence the perceptions of agriculture on a national scale. There are examples where challenges to the perceptions of agriculture have taken place by the use of technology to seriously undermine agriculture's perceived place and role in the psyche of urban Australians.

One of agriculture's most serious challenges comes from an organisation which long ago harnessed resources through the use of social media and a strong unified web site presence. That organisation is Animals Australia. It is an umbrella group; a coalition of over 40 animal activist organisations, plus individual members, who operate for a common cause under the banner of Animals Australia (Animals Australia, undated). The individual member organisations and individual members are free to pursue their own agendas and some of the more extremist groups, such as Animal Liberation and Voiceless, are often in the news for their barely legal activities. Animals Australia coordinates fundraising, organises media advertising and effectively lobbies governments and corporate institutions. It is the public face of animal welfare activism in Australia and it is highly successful. It has affected the perceptions of what constitutes animal cruelty in the minds of urban people and particularly in the youth demographic. In terms of the urbanised populations that are disassociated from their food supplies, Animals Australia is building new perceptions of what agriculture is. If not for the residual historical social memories of agriculture's place in society and history, the perceptions of agriculture would be a lot more radicalised than they currently are. Animals Australia managed to influence government to such an extent, that it shut down the live export industry. Animals Australia is in constant communication with its membership base through a strong online presence and it has very positive and effective feedback loops. By any measure it has been extremely successful.

The Mineral Council of Australia is often lionised as the epitome of corporate and business unity. The Mineral Council touts itself as:

> [T]he peak industry body of Australia's exploration, mining and minerals processing industry. It represents the minerals industry, both nationally and internationally, in advancing its contribution to sustainable development and to society.
>
> (Minerals Council of Australia, undated)

The Mineral Council speaks for disparate groups which have common interests. It coordinates the representations of the mining industry to government decision-makers and it coordinates the creation of generic media advertising, using mainstream media outlets, of powerful advertising

campaigns which have firmly entrenched in the minds of Australians, positive and powerful perceptions of mining as vital to the future growth of the nation's wealth and future prosperity. The Minerals Council promotes career paths in the industry and sells mining as an upmarket, attractive occupation. It fosters no negative stereotypes and has created and manipulated information that controls the public's perceptions of the mining industry.

In chaos theory, the effect of the fluttering of a butterfly's wings is a metaphor for a perturbation within an existing system which can have far-reaching consequences, with outcomes often vastly different from those which would have otherwise occurred. The innovation butterfly is a metaphor for minor internal perturbations which can significantly alter outcomes and create an irreversible evolution in an organisation. Agriculture needs to release a butterfly.

Australian agriculture needs its peak representative bodies to make a slight shift in emphasis away from their traditional roles as lobby groups and to place more emphasis on public relations and communication. This perturbation to an existing set of circumstances would have profound ramifications. For instance, dealing with government policy and decision-makers who do not have a positive perception of agriculture is proving to be more and more difficult, as demonstrated by recent outcomes in the areas of animal welfare and land management outcomes which have adversely impacted on agriculture. If the current trends in public perceptions continue, the lobbying exercises will prove to be even more difficult. In fact, agriculture's social licenses could be seriously curtailed and even, in certain circumstances, withdrawn. If the peak industry bodies were to shift their emphasis towards public relations and communications, the long-term payoff would be community public policy-makers who have positive perceptions of agriculture's place in society. In other words, a shift towards public relations and communication, modelled on both the Minerals Council of Australia and Animals Australia, would result in outcomes vastly different from those currently being experienced by agriculture's disorganised presence in the information society. This proposed shift in focus would create a new and coherent framework within which perceptions of agriculture could be created and to which urban populations could relate. Properly done, public relations (PR) makes a significant contribution to an organisation's strategic planning, helping the organisation to adapt to threats and to opportunities (Chaka & Lesego 2011). Communications activities should be adopted to synchronise the creation of a similar framework within all the peak organisations so that the public relations strategies can be coordinated. If the emphasis is shifted towards PR and communications, positive non-linear feedback loops will be created between the disparate organisations and individuals who utilise social media channels. Ideally one peak organisation should be able to coordinate the production of an overarching national narrative to create the framework required for the development of positive public perceptions. This was recommended by a Select Senate Committee which recommended the agricultural narrative be re-written and a new peak organisation, representative of all agribusiness, be formed to create that narrative (Agribusiness Council of Australia 2012).

A slight cultural shift is required from within all the peak representative organisations so they see themselves as PR and communication specialists, rather than paid lobbyists for their constituents, whose reactive efforts are becoming less effective. A shift in focus and a reallocation of resources would enable the peak bodies to each employ a PR specialist, plus communications technicians to construct the new framework and to control the use of all media; digital, as done by Animals Australia and mainstream as done by the Minerals Council. Media discourse is part of the process by which people construct meaning (Candace & Joosuk 2010). Agriculture needs to unify, to coordinate its efforts and to control that media discourse. As stated earlier, a positive knowledge of and perception about agriculture is a prerequisite for the development of good policy decisions related to agriculture. Without them, the social license of agriculture will be at risk.

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About the Author

John Keily is a fifth generation farmer with a long history of involvement in rural affairs. He was born and bred to the family dairy and beef property in Victoria's Gippsland region. In 1997 his dairy herd was judged to be one of the top in the nation.

John is a past Victorian Young Farmer Exchangee to the United Kingdom and was subsequently the founding President of the Australian Rural Exchangees Association. John spent four years at state level with the Victorian Farmers Federation, before having a tilt at politics. He then went back to university as a mature age student to study law, anthropology and philosophy with a little bit of economics thrown in. He is currently studying for a Bachelor of Communication through distance education.

In 2005 John was one of 10 national drought relief counsellors appointed by the Federal Government to drive the uptake of and to administer the programs associated with the decade long millennial drought.

John also developed a career as a writer and journalist. In 2003 he was flown to Kyoto, Japan, by the World Bank and awarded a runner-up prize in the print section of a global journalism competition run by the bank. John sold the farm in 2004 and has since concentrated on writing, marketing and advising small business.

John lives in the small town of Rosedale, in Victoria's Gippsland region.

Who Cares What the Punters Think? Australian Agriculture 2013 and Beyond

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Categorising Australian agriculture is no mean feat. It spans commodities from livestock, to fibre, to fruit and vegetables and grains; that are grown in all states and territories across about 135,000 farms. Agricultural products are exported to hundreds of countries across the globe as well as providing around 93% of the daily Australian food supply (National Farmers' Federation 2012). Agriculturalists in one way or another manage 61% of our great nation's land mass and are worth, at last count, around $48.7 billion to the Australian economy every year (National Farmers' Federation 2012).[1]

Given this significant role, do (as opposed to should) community perceptions really matter for Australian agriculture? Of course they do. Assuming that what is meant by 'the community' is the consumer, the parent, the taxpayer and the voter. The community is at once the judge and jury in a trial by media.

There is no clearer way of saying this – what our community thinks of agriculture matters and will continue to be so, but it is community *acceptance* over perception that will be the driver of Australian agriculture in years to come.

Perception Versus Reality: What the Community Really Thinks

Articulating this truly depends on who you ask and what you ask them. How can one ever truly objectively gauge what the community perceives? Is it through their purchasing patterns as told to us through Neilsen data? It is what side of Parliament they vote? Is it how they Tweet, Facebook, Instagram or poll online? Is it which not for profit group they belong to? Is reflected in what the media reports on?

It is a truism thus to say we can never fully grasp what is happening in the community, with all its nuances and diversities, and what they perceive agriculture to be.

We do know, however, that the Australian farmer occupies a unique position in the Australian psyche. Our farmers repeatedly come in the as the 'most trusted' professional category in popular research, listed behind only emergency workers and healthcare professionals (*Reader's Digest Australia* 2013). Yet research conducted by retailers tells us the community sees farmers as antiquated, although precisely how they lag behind the times isn't articulated (Woolworths 2009).

Other more global research suggests that only some farmers fit into this hallowed 'most trusted' bracket: smaller, more intensive production systems (hobby farmers in the eyes of the Australian production system) – whereas broadacre livestock was viewed to be an industrial undertaking and presumably in the 'non-farming' and 'not to be trusted' basket.

Dinner party research suggests that the 'bush cousin' is still the rugged figure in a Drizabone, Akubra and RM Williams riding off into the sunset. More reliably, the rise and rise of urban farmers markets sourcing local product[2] (Sensis 2009), a consumer demand for transparency from 'paddock to plate' and even guerrilla gardening suggests that people miss the connection to the bush and producing food.

This 'foodie farmer' trend has not been lost on Australia's two largest fresh food retailers. Coles and Woolworths source virtually all their fresh produce locally – upwards of 95% – and are

1 Gross farmgate only – the entire agricultural value chain is estimated to be $155 billion.

2 Nine in 10 Australians believe eating Australian-grown food is important, with almost six in 10 of these believing it was very important to them.

rolling out a range of locally sourced, regionally grown specialty products across Australia, like Coles' South Australian Bickford's cordial and the Woolworths' Manning Valley 'Farmers Own' milk.

This trend doesn't end with food – fibres too are moving towards a more transparent supply chain model. This was exemplified by the launch of 'Honest By,' a clothing company founded by a former Hugo Boss art director which details at length production costs and origin as well as the mark-up costs for each individual item in their inventory.

Informal reports indicate another, less romantic, image of 'community' perceptions. Politicians Bob Katter and Barnby Joyce were the names commonly associated with perceptions of agriculture by a small sample of Sydneyites informally interviewed by the Australian Farm Institute (2013).

Official statistics on the state of agriculture paint a very different story. The average age of farmers is 53 years, compared with 40 years for people in other occupations. Women also account for around a quarter of all farmers (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010–11). The dashing Australian stockman it is not.

What if you ask 'agriculture' itself? A rare question that Nielsen data or political polls will not reveal. A Queensland mango grower supplying domestically compared to a Western Australian sheep producer geared for live export markets in the Middle East have a very different tale to tell, but some things are constant. In this author's experience, farmers generally are both the Chief Executive Officer and the farm hand[3] (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010–11) – are managing everything in between – and are at once frustrated and fatigued by the battle for the bottom line and the ability to make a dollar.

Ag Versus the Rest: How Other Sectors Fare

The good news? Community perceptions of agriculture are surprisingly healthy when rated against other sectors, to the extent that the level of trust invested with agriculture far outweighs its contribution to the GDP.

A 2013 Essential Media survey rated agriculture the most trusted sector (with up to 72% trust), with other power brokers of the Australian economy like tourism (68%), construction (48%) and mining (32%) lagging behind significantly in the community trust stakes.

Consistent with this, other sectors too have had their fair share of community uproars and haphazard perceptions. Think asbestos, oil spills

and community health scares – you name it, these sectors too have dealt with warranted and unwarranted notions of community perception and lack of acceptance.

Other sectors are, however, constantly attempting to improve their perception amongst their consumer and citizen community – the Origin Energy withdrawal of support of the popular Roma races citing animal welfare is a key example.

Case Studies: Community Acceptance is King

Well-paid consultants give it a grandiose term like 'social license to operate,' but the reality is agriculture does need this community acceptance to survive, irrespective of individual perceptions.

3 48% of farmers are owner operators living with just a spouse.

Despite the varying perceptions of trust lent to farmers or agriculture as a whole, this is at odds with the highly publicised blows dealt to Australian agriculture over the years across a range of sectors. Think about the supermarket duopoly and the $1 milk 'price wars' that continue today in the popular media; the Federal Government's 2011 live export ban to Indonesia; the Abercrombie & Fitch boycott (later followed by high profile brands such as Gap Inc, H&M, Next, Hugo Boss and Liz Claiborne) of Australian merino wool over mulesing in the early 2000s; and the 1990s battle the Australian cotton

industries fought against accusations of causing leukaemia with pesticide treatments.

There are two extremes at which one can best measure the importance of community perception. One is the dollar milk scandal – call it consumer-driven endorsement or acceptance. In 2011, Coles advertised and retailed milk at $1 per litre, which Woolworths promptly matched. Despite intensive media coverage with outcries from dairy farmers Australia-wide and significant calls for consumers to boycott the $1 product (what Coles Head of Corporate Affairs later labelled 'angry farmer noise'), the product remains on the shelves to this day.

In fact, at the fastest growing retailer in the country, ALDI – four litres of Australian milk cost $3.96 – indeed less than a dollar per litre. The consumer as king has spoken and $1 milk won over the farmer's bottom line when put to the commercial consensus of the 'community' (Coles Market Research 2012).[4]

This being said, it has also driven a niche 'bottled milk' market of vertically integrated dairy farmers and farmer friendly consumers, like the 'Scenic Rim 4 Real' brand in South East Queensland. Some members of the community, it would seem, are more discerning in their diary selection.

Then there is the other extreme, minority-driven perceptions driver within the community (remembering that the average Australian consumes around 104 litres of milk per annum, minority is really considered an appropriate term). The Animals Australia campaign to ban the live export cattle trade to Indonesia in June 2011 after 'A Bloody Business' was screened on ABC was ultimately clinched by a petition of reportedly around 200,000 individuals delivered to Parliament House. In a nation of 23 million this is not a great deal and indeed, recent research from the Sexton Marketing Group (2012) shows that most Australians (around 69%) are pro live export. The presence of screamingly apparent animal welfare issues does not change the fact that ultimately a small section of the Australian community was able to cease a trade virtually overnight (which had far-reaching diplomatic ramifications between Australia and Indonesia).

When both niche groups and the consumer at large have the power to impact on the daily business of farmers via a scan at the supermarket, or an e-signature hastily sent, a solid base of acceptance of farming is crucial. On both a large and small scale, the community as both citizen and consumer has the ability to deny profit and profitability, cut-off markets, and shutdown an industry.

This 'community acceptance' is critical and must be recognised as such when looking to the future of Australian agriculture.

4 Eight out of 10 Australians want lower prices.

2013 and Beyond: Safeguarding for 'Acceptance'?

It would be naive to think that there is a one size fits all solution given the diversity, size and scope of the agriculture sector. However, broadly speaking, we already know what citizens and consumers want – locally sourced food and fibre, at a transparent and economical cost, that is firstly sustainable and secondly ethical (Meat & Livestock Australia 2011).

It is simply not enough to be trusted and immortalised in outback iconography without being understood – to matter, Australian agriculture needs to talks directly to the Australian community to gain this vital acceptance.

Brave New World: Actions, Investors and Gains

So we know consumers are parochial, like fresh food, and want farmers to be kind to the land and animals. Yet the reality is – anecdotal and evidence based – that there is a disparity between what agriculture knows it is doing and what the community knows, leading to disconnection and (at times) disenchantment.

It will be different for all commodities, and depend on their markets and be a whole of supply chain endeavour. The answer is: seeking this community acceptance is not simple, but the heart of the matter is giving people what they want and reacting to the needs of a community of consumers.

Agriculture needs to more proactively gauge the level of acceptance in the community, while simultaneously responding to the concerns already raised. A multi-pronged approach is necessary, covering the following strategies:

1. Australian agriculture across the board needs to take responsibility for the Australian community and their perceptions

   Farmers need to take responsibility beyond the farm gate and engage with community stakeholders – simply on-selling a product is not enough. An initiative is needed that connects directly with citizens and consumers that shows that Aussie agriculture cares – every day in every way.

   This would be a multi-pronged community engagement strategy that includes but is not limited to activities such as – open farm visits during harvests, shearing and mustering; webinars showing 'gate to plate' or what happens to our crops; 'adopt a cow' – where companies or school classes could adopt an animal and follow it through its journey in life remotely; work with retailers to develop a 'smart phone' scan system for fresh produce

   – which takes you on a virtual tour of the farm and offers the farm's favourite recipe for that product.

   The benefits would be wide-ranging – farmers would be communicating directly with the community – and the community would be talking straight back to farmers on issues, good and bad. It would restore a personal connection to food and food production between farmer and consumer outside of the four walls of a supermarket.

   Whilst depending on the particular initiatives, this would be best achieved by a consortium of agricultural research and marketing providers, peak industry bodies and a cooperative of farmers across all commodities willing to engage and make agriculture relevant.

2. Australian agriculture needs to understand Australians

A 'whole of sector' annual consumer survey that gauges where agriculture sits in the mind of the community is needed. Comparable to the Centre for Food Integrity in America, investigating attitudes towards agricultural production, manufacturing, exports and the end product of our food.

This would benefit industry to benchmark community attitudes towards issues (such as Hormone Growth Promotants – in or

out?), identify drivers behind this (why are consumers so concerned with cage laid eggs?) and help shape industry responses over the short, middle and long term (seek strategies in relation to the number one consumer food issue, animal welfare). This would likely be best done by independent consultants at the investment of industry.

3. Australian agriculture needs to work with the consumers of tomorrow from gate to plate

Australians born after 1996 are different. They are increasingly less likely to have a connection to the bush and have grown up in the era of smartphones and celebrity chefs. They, one day, will be the Australian community whose acceptance agriculture seeks.

There are two key measures agriculture could work towards to support this. Firstly, a compulsory agricultural education in schools that ranges from production, manufacturing, retail and export as well as agribusiness.

Whilst this would gradually improve Australians' collective knowledge of agriculture, it could give rise to a whole suite of reciprocal innovations for Australian agriculture (eg Best Production App competition; or schools assisting in writing and implementing marketing and branding strategies for regionally branded boxed beef).

Secondly, commodities need to be working with schools, as a captive consumer base, in growing demand for their own product, as per the Fontera 'Milk for Schools' program run in New Zealand (which goes as far as providing fridges for participating schools). It is something that will definitely provide return on investment over the long term; and could best be actioned in liaison with the private sector (such as through corporate social responsibility funds).

4. Australian agriculture needs to be able to substantiate claims to the community

The Cotton Australia Best Management Practices have successfully provided assurances to the community that pesticides do not cause leukaemia. Similarly, if Australian beef is the cleanest, greenest and is of the highest welfare standard – how is this evidenced?

Like the cotton industry, other agricultural commodities need to be able to provide reliable, science-based claims as one strategy in seeking community acceptance.

Agricultural data across all industries needs to be consistent and available. This would provide a range of benefits including the consolidation of industry data across the sector, and provide evidence to Australian agriculture's claims across key areas like sustainability, safety and ethical treatment.

As a central stakeholder amongst a diverse industry, the Department of Agriculture would

be best placed to provide the coordinating role in providing the initial scoping work for this data.

5. Australian agriculture must capitalise on the value of farmers' unique position in Australians' minds

Individual commodities and the sector collectively needs to revisit their marketing to reposition it as a lifestyle and parochial choice (think Tourism Australia) to capitalise on positive, iconic perceptions of Australian agriculture.

Over the pond, 100% Pure New Zealand has had an incredibly successful national branding strategy with tangible benefits the world over. Similarly, on a smaller scale, look to regional Australian success stories like Milly Hill Lamb and Signature Beef.

A strategy again best initially led by the Australian Government as a facilitator and as the key central stakeholder.

6. Australian agriculture must be positioned to be as profitable and innovative as possible

From on-farm to the floor of Parliament House agriculture needs to be the very best it can be. Agriculture averages growth in productivity of around 2.8% per year and all stakeholders need to individually look for innovations to improve on-farm productivity and profitability.

However, off-farm policy and politics need to support agriculture in every way by expanding market access (starting with the critical Australia-Republic of Korea Free Trade Agreement), reducing red tape as well as investing in research and development, and transport and infrastructure.

Where to From Here: Punters' Perceptions Versus Acceptance?

There is no one solution, one stakeholder, one strategy or one easy fix in gaining community acceptance of agriculture. It needs a multi-pronged approach that focuses on collaboration over in-fighting and 'cutting out the middle man' to engage directly with the community-at-large through a range of hands-on and hands-off approaches.

This would need to be carefully risk managed and negotiated to avoid collapsing altogether. It is a starting point rather than a complete solution and could fail without sufficient investment of goodwill, time and money.

However, it can be done. What is not an option is to simply wait for the next crisis to resurface and for perceptions to suffer, and community acceptance to become completely 'out of stock'.

The good news is that some of the community does love agriculture and some simply like it. The rest of the community are the challenge, acceptance is the most realistic goal, and is the goal which will define the future viability of Australian agriculture.

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Anna Campbell currently works in the agri-political sector as the Senior Livestock Policy Director for AgForce Cattle Ltd and held a range of public and private sector roles in the Northern Territory, America and Vanuatu previously. Anna has a Bachelor of International Relations and is looking to commence study on a Master of Agribusiness in 2013. Anna calls Blackall, Central Western Queensland home where her family currently run a breeder cattle enterprise.

Do Community Perceptions of Australian Agriculture Really Matter?

Lucy Broad

Director, Cox Inall Communications

> There are things known and there are things unknown, and in between are the doors of perception. (Huxley 1954)

The time has long passed when the majority of Australians had a direct connection with agriculture.

Now, close to two-thirds of the population resides in a capital city. In any given year, less than a million actually visit a farm (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012a), out of a population of more than 23 million (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012b).

Increasingly, the vast majority of Australians rely for their understanding and perceptions of agriculture on sources of information far removed from the production supply chain.

The accuracy of the information, and motives behind it are often questionable. The media (social media, advertising, popular television programs, news), politicians, industry leaders, retailers or even friends and family all impose their own values and filters about Australia's agricultural industries.

Perceptions slowly build over time through a noisy barrage of stories and information that might be positive, but might also include images of farmers burning irrigation plans, activists storming a piggery, cattle being inhumanely slaughtered in a foreign abattoir, citrus trees being ripped up by their roots or crops withering through a drought.

Those perceptions about agriculture have the potential to influence a wide range of behaviours and activities, which can impact the sector significantly over time.

Negative perceptions about career opportunities in agriculture might lead to lower enrolments in tertiary courses, a shortage of skilled workforce, and reduced productivity.

Concerns about the use of biotechnology in food production could influence consumer purchasing behaviour, and ultimately result in the loss of time and money-saving tools on-farm.

Fear that certain production systems negatively impact animal welfare can influence government, consumer and retailer behaviour, and lead to greater regulation and compliance costs for producers, and the potential loss of markets.

Perceptions about poor environmental management, can tighten government regulations, adding to the cost burdens on-farm.

Negative perceptions about levels of foreign ownership in Australian farmland can influence policy-makers to restrict opportunities for much needed investment of overseas capital into agriculture.

Community perceptions of agriculture do matter, but before we can address them, we need to be sure we know what they actually are.

What the Community Thinks of Agriculture

Of all the industry sectors in Australia, agriculture is the 'most trusted to act in the public interest', if an Essential Media Communications Poll conducted in January 2013 is to be believed. Your local farmer is apparently more publicly accountable than your bank manager, telco, or even your favourite media source (Keogh 2013).

The Australian Farm Institute recently asked a small sample of people in Sydney about their perceptions of Australian agriculture, and who leads the sector. Responses suggested that community perceptions of Australian agriculture are often very traditional, rather than modern or progressive, and there is no recognised leader.

Ten years ago, some market research by the National Farmers' Federation (NFF) revealed no contemporary understanding or appreciation of farming, its direct or flow-on economic significance, or its important environmental contribution. Negative attitudes towards farming included that it was 'antiquated', a 'relic of a by-gone era', a 'way-of-life that was dead or dying', 'reliant on handouts', and 'irrelevant to modern Australia'. The NFF found that these perceptions fuelled views that farmers 'rape the environment', and 'can't be trusted as responsible land managers' (University of Technology Sydney 2007).

During 2012 stakeholder meetings for the National Farmers' Federation Blueprint for Agriculture, concern around community perceptions of agriculture was rated as the third most important issue, after government policy and commodity prices (National Farmers' Federation 2013a).

The Blueprint describes six key areas where public perceptions are having strong impacts on agriculture. They are: biotechnology/genetically modified organisms, health and food safety, environmental sustainability, animal welfare, social responsibility and affordability of food (National Farmers' Federation 2013a).

Where the evidence exists for these being the subject of negative perceptions about agriculture it is, however, not conclusive.

For biotechnology, the NFF Blueprint quotes from a report of the former Department of Industry, Innovation, Science and Research (DIISR) that stated support for applications of biotechnology to food and agriculture was lower than support for applications in health and medicine (National Farmers' Federation 2013a).

However further analysis of the DIISR report showed that the willingness to eat genetically modified (GM) crops in processed foods (including staples such as bread and milk) had increased since 2007. It also found that attitudes were not necessarily associated with behaviour, and that there was strong support for new applications such as GM non-food crops and GM in pest control (Ipsos Eureka Social Research Institute 2010).

In the area of food safety, CSIRO studies are quoted to have found that food safety is arguably the most important concern driving consumer food choice. However CSIRO also found that in the absence of publicity to arouse public fears, these perceptions of relative risk may have little effect on purchasing patterns (CSIRO 2011).

Public perceptions that agricultural production is not environmentally sustainable do not appear to be significant enough to be influencing the general community's behaviour. A report funded by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) found that consumers are indeed increasingly interested in sustainability values associated with Australian farm products. However RIRDC also reported that these consumers found price was more important than the product being environmentally friendly (Ecker 2008).

Surprisingly, even perceptions around agricultural careers are inconsistent. A study by the Allen Consulting Group (2012) found that agriculture

suffers from poor perceptions, based on a lack of understanding of what a career in agriculture entails.

Those negative perceptions by the general public towards agricultural careers – low salaries, dirty labouring work in drought conditions, limited opportunities – have been blamed for low enrolments in agriculture related courses (Chudleigh et al. 1991).

At the 2001 National Youth Roundtable it was recorded that the majority of people had a positive notion towards rural life with perceptions primarily focusing on the romance of the country and what a lovely lifestyle it would be. Yet

when people started to think about working in the agricultural industry, they were very negative towards the idea and didn't see it as a viable long-term career option. Nine years later, discussions facilitated by the Future Farmers Network found that this thought process had not changed (Future Farmers Network 2008).

However the number of school leavers in 2012 who put agriculture degrees as their first preference for study jumped 15%, an increase after years of decline that no-one has really been able to explain (Howden & Preiss 2013).

Extensive mainstream and social media coverage of animal welfare issues around live exports and intensive pig and poultry production, would suggest it is of significant interest to the general community. Through the 'Make it Possible' campaign run by Animals Australia, more than 167,000 individuals have pledged their support to a 'world without factory farming' (Animals Australia 2013). However there is little robust information on what the community actually thinks.

Are they opposed to intensive agriculture? Have they stopped eating meat? Would they be supportive if they knew the animals were cared for according to international best practice, and that they were proven to be 'happy'?

The NFF's Blueprint recognises that there is a real lack of understanding of consumer perceptions of agriculture, and that addressing this should be a high priority (National Farmers' Federation 2013a).

In Australia there appears to have been no recent definitive survey of community perceptions about agriculture. Our 'best guess' is based on anecdotal evidence from public forums and online and media commentary, and observations about how agriculture is reported in mainstream media.

In the absence of a mechanism like the European Eurobarometer, which regularly surveys community attitudes to a range of issues (such as European Union citizens' knowledge of green products and their reasons for buying, or not buying them), we run the risk of misreading community perceptions and therefore responding with something that doesn't actually address the concerns (European Commission 2013).

A United Kingdom study also found that it's important to accurately understand what community perceptions are, rather than what we think they are. Findings of a report about public perceptions of agricultural biotechnologies, suggested that most policy-makers' conceptions of public attitudes and perceptions turned out to be mere 'myths' (Marris et al. 2001).

In the United States, a study was carried out at North Dakota State University in 2001 because it was felt that obtaining knowledge about how the public views agriculture was a necessary step

in correcting misperceptions and would help the industry and policy-makers understand the beliefs and values of the populace.

Overall, respondents had a favourable view of agriculture. A majority strongly agreed that farmers have a positive impact on their local economy, the loss of farmers in the region would greatly hurt the local economy, and the government should do more to help farmers in their area stay in business (Wachenheim & Rathge 2000).

Community Perceptions of Other Sectors of the Economy

Unlike Australian agriculture, with its more than 4000 representative organisations, the Australian mining industry has worked hard to represent itself as a unified entity speaking with a single voice (Bettles 2012).

The peak organisation, the Minerals Council of Australia (MCA) is the single group representing Australia's exploration, mining and minerals processing industry, nationally and internationally.

The MCA, like agriculture, has tried to tap into the emotional vein of community perceptions, and has funded expensive high profile media campaigns that have influenced shifts in public policy and attempted to change community perception of the industry.

The messages have been around the industry's contribution to the economy and Australians' quality of life. MCA member companies produce more than 85% of Australia's annual mineral output and the Council's website tells us that the minerals industry is a major contributor to national income, investment, high-wage jobs, exports and government revenues in Australia (Minerals Council of Australia 2013).

A survey done by SBS as part of a television documentary on Australia's mining industry found Australians are indeed keenly aware of the importance of mining to the national economy and our national identity. They feel a sense of ownership of our mineral resources and acknowledge that mining has played a crucial role in shaping Australia (SBS 2012).

In fact, some might argue the mining industry has done an extraordinary job in influencing perceptions.

A survey by the Australia Institute found public perceptions of the size and significance of the mining industry to the Australian economy are radically different to the facts. When asked what percentage of workers those surveyed believed were employed in the mining industry, the average response was around 16%, when according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) the actual figure is 1.9%. The survey also found Australians believe that mining accounts for more than one-third (35%) of economic activity. However, ABS figures show that the mining industry accounts for around 9.2% of GDP (The Australia Institute 2011).

However community perceptions about the actual benefits flowing from the mining industry to individuals, appear to be a little more circumspect.

Following its successful campaign against the 'mining tax' in 2010, the Council pulled out the cheque book again two years later in the lead-up to the federal budget, with emotive ads telling us how much miners love Australia.

The ABC's 'The Drum' commissioned an Essential Research panel to review the community's response. Two-thirds saw no personal benefit to the mining boom dominating Australia's economy, while just 2% said they had benefited a lot. The Minerals Council's proposition that the industry is over-taxed was rejected by a ratio of three to one (Lewis & Woods 2012).

Sustainability is one of the many issues agriculture is keen to be judged favourably on, but for Australia's fishing industry it is the key challenge and primary benchmark for positive perceptions of the industry's performance.

In 2011 the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) carried out a survey to gauge community perceptions about the achievements and ongoing investment the industry is making into achieving long-term sustainability.

Of the one thousand adults surveyed, only one-third felt the industry was sustainable. Of the two-thirds who felt it was not, half said it never would be.

The survey did, however, find that community perceptions around sustainability of commercial fishing was a key driver of perceptions of the industry as a whole, and that focusing on it would help drive improvements in the 'whole of industry' result (Sparks 2011).

Perhaps one of the most 'measured' of all industries is the very consumer focused tourism industry, always sense checking perceptions and the impact of positioning and destination campaigns.

In the popular destination state of Tasmania, a 2011 local survey provided results that agriculture can aspire to.

More than 90% of the local community believed that tourism had an overall positive impact on the community. More than half felt it also benefited their personal lives (Tourism Research Australia 2011).

What Should Agriculture Do Differently to Influence Community Perceptions?

It would be easy if all we needed to do to change perceptions was 'talk up' agriculture in the general community. Using emotion is regularly heralded as the way for agriculture to counter animal or environmental activists, or win over the support of the community. There are regular calls for effective slogans and high profile celebrities to 'cut through' the media noise, celebrate our agricultural industry and convince the community they should support Australian farmers and Australian agribusiness.

Certainly the supermarkets have recognised there is some value in providing consumers with warm and fuzzy feelings about farming, to help sell their own brands.

Unfortunately, the agricultural industry has tried that and it has failed.

The Australian Year of The Farmer is the most recent of a long line of high profile public relations programs to try and shift perceptions about farming, with questionable success (Keogh 2013).

Education and communication certainly have their place, but only when the industry is crystal clear about what it wants to say, has an effective mechanism for saying it, and can provide a value proposition as to why the community should even sit up and take any notice.

Knowing what the problem is

Before the industry lands on a particular course of action, it needs to know what the problem is it is trying to solve.

There is so little clear, current information about exactly what community perceptions are of agriculture, the first step is to commission some work that tests the industry's beliefs and assumptions about community perceptions. It would also look at the impact of those perceptions on behaviour, including purchasing, advocacy and public commentary.

Having something to say

Agriculture in Australia is a sophisticated, professional, highly regulated modern industry that contributes significantly to the country's GDP.

These attributes are in evidence in every production sector and agribusiness, through the vast myriad of best practice standards, regulations and accreditation programs that every farm and agribusiness must meet, simply to be allowed to operate.

Industry is required to meet and be assessed on best practice standards in OH&S, animal welfare, chemical handling and usage, water efficiency and food safety. All these things are already an accepted part of farming and business operations.

Other professions such as accountants, lawyers and medical practitioners are accredited for meeting a minimum professional standard. Such a standard could also become the recognised mark of agricultural best practice.

The agribusiness standard or brand would evolve as the result of meeting a minimum number of the mandatory rigorous requirements that are already an accepted part of farming or agribusiness. It would be a result of assessment and coordination of existing quality assurance (QA) or program standards, rather than re-inventing the wheel with new ones.

The standard could then be displayed on produce and promoted as a guarantee of the professional, best practice operations that have resulted in the quality, world-class product being sold.

Through the brand, the industry then has an incredibly powerful message that focuses not so much on the farmers, but on the benefits of their output, underpinned by an accreditation that provides the rigour to substantiate the claims.

The industry can show clearly that their outputs are, among other attributes, safe, high quality, traceable, produced sustainability, and have met rigorous animal welfare standards.

A single voice

Agriculture needs a single voice to represent the supply chain from production to market. As a fragmented industry, it currently struggles to unite to raise funds for public activities, or advocate with a consistent message.

The NFF markets itself as the voice of farmers. The organisational changes in 2009 to broaden the base were in the right direction, but did not go far enough. The Board is made up of farmers and farmer representative groups, with no representation at board level from agribusiness. Across its membership, there are big sectors missing, including grain trading and processing, rural research and development (R&D), meat processors, animal health, crop protection, food manufacturers and major retailers, to name a few.

The Agribusiness Council has unsuccessfully attempted to fill the gap as a single point of contact in Canberra. Ideally the NFF needs to either re-position and re-brand, or become a subsidiary of a broader umbrella organisation that truly represents the agribusiness sector.

Promote the message far and wide

With clear messages around the professionalism and world best practice standards that Australian farmers adhere to, together with the value proposition for the community, the industry can then work on education and communication strategies.

Partnerships with retailers and environmental groups, and even with more moderate animal welfare organisations could all be part of the approach to effectively leverage any available networks into the broader community and promote the positioning.

A stamp, or brand would be developed to represent the accreditation earned by those products which met the prescribed minimum best-practice standards. Communication materials would support an explanation of the brand, and a media program would be rolled out on social and mainstream media, leveraging the networks and capabilities of all the agricultural industry members, manufacturers and retailers along the supply chain.

Seed funding would be sourced initially from the peak organisation membership, but the ongoing funding of the program might be on a cost recovery basis, with the benefits of being involved quickly offsetting a small price tag on being able to use the brand on products that meet the standards.

The outcome

The Australian Farm Institute has previously called for consumers to be given reasons to seek out Australian products (Keogh 2013).

The agricultural industry is not short of these reasons. Every day farmers and agribusinesses are meeting international best practice to produce products that are safe, high quality, environmentally sustainable and adhering to stringent animal welfare guidelines.

Those businesses meeting the highest standards should be recognised as such, and be able to

leverage their professionalism to market their goods to the broader community.

Recognition of these standards in a brand that is earned by best practice, becomes an incentive to those who don't yet meet the minimum mark.

Promoted effectively, and in partnership with other stakeholders, the brand will impact perceptions and consumers will start to seek out products that provide such assurances of professional and high standard business practices.

If the messages around these branded quality products are promoted clearly and effectively, and are informed by community perceptions that we are sure about, and are not just guessing at, they will give the community reason to seek these products out, and perhaps even pay a price premium for them.

They will support a clear narrative about a modern, professional industry that is not only critical to our economy and to the nation's long-term wellbeing, but is unified in its objective and messages and leads the world in the production of excellent food and fibre products.

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About the Author

Lucy Broad has more than 30 years' experience as a journalist, broadcaster and consultant, extensive relationships with the Australian media and a wide network of contacts in agribusiness, the Australian Government and rural communities.

Lucy has a deep understanding and corporate knowledge of the issues of Australian agriculture and natural resource management from her 23 years as a senior reporter and ABC executive, and her role as the head of the agribusiness and natural resources management practice area at Cox Inall.

Prior to joining Cox Inall Lucy was Head of Network Scheduling with ABC Radio, a senior management role responsible for scheduling across the ABC's five domestic radio networks. She has also held positions as regional reporter, Senior Presenter Country Hour, National Editor Rural Radio and State Director for the ABC in Queensland.

During her media career Lucy also fronted Countrywide, ABC TV's rural current affairs program, was a reporter for Prime TV's Cross Country and a reporter on 'A Question of Survival' for ABC TV's Quantum.

On joining Cox Inall Lucy managed successful national communication campaigns for a number of corporate clients, research and development corporations, government agencies and non-for-profit organisations.

Lucy has led high profile projects including the development of the communication strategy for the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy, consultation around the development of a national food plan for Australia, and community engagement on changes to the approach to drought support.

Lucy is also an experienced conference chair, media trainer, program host and facilitator.

Lucy holds a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture from Sydney University and a Graduate Diploma in Business Administration. Lucy is also a Graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

Do Communities' Perceptions of Australian Agriculture Really Matter?

Jessica Fleetwood
Student, La Trobe University

The Australian community's perceptions and consequential attitudes towards Australian agriculture will determine the overall success of the industry. Both negative and positive perceptions of the industry have a direct effect on the economic, environmental and social prosperity of agriculture within Australia. Community concerns in relation to animal welfare, environmental conservation and gene engineering have initiated debates over the challenges facing the agricultural industry. The direct effect from the strong community stance on issues such as the concern over animal welfare in the production of livestock, the growth and distribution of genetically modified crops and the adverse environmental effects from farming processes have consistently pushed the industry to revise its operations. Changes to farming operations with the aim to conserve natural resources, limit climate change and to reduce biosecurity threats have been adopted by the industry. In addition, the agricultural industry has instated legislation such as a code of practice and the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS) to improve animal welfare practices across the industry (DAFF 2013).

The agricultural industry must adapt to community concerns constantly, involving industry revision of current practices and initiating changes to maintain sustainability. It is evident that the Australian community has the ability to force change within the agricultural industry.

The marked decline in young people entering the agricultural industry is a reflection of the significance of the community perception of agriculture within Australia. The direct result has been consistent decline in enrolments into agriculture and related degrees in the last decade (Keogh 2013). Considering the importance of community perceptions of agriculture, the industry must adopt effective marketing techniques in order to promote the industry to young people. Comparisons can be drawn between the Australian agricultural industry and the Australian Defence Force Academy (ADFA). ADFA was forced to implement effective marketing techniques in order to change the image of the defence force and to attract new recruits. The Australian community perception of agriculture has direct significance to the innovation, productivity and conservation of the industry.

The Australian community's perception of the agricultural industry has changed remarkably over the 20th century (Henzell 2007). Consequently, the importance and the effect of these perceptions on the industry has also transformed. The agricultural industry, which has fed a growing population and provided an economic foundation, has been considered vital to Australia's economic and social progress. This observation can be drawn from the period of the 1950s when Australia experienced a short-lived economic boom due to the prosperity of the wool industry (Lennon & Pearson 2010). The gross value of wool production had increased to 56% of the total value of production from agricultural industry. The idea that Australia's economic and social development was 'riding on the sheep's back' was formed. In 1901, the national census stated that 14% of the total Australian population was employed within the agricultural industry (AG Workforce 2013). Many Australians chose to work within the agricultural industry in the early 20th century. The farming lifestyle, however, was associated with an isolated existence involving mental and physical hardship.

Today, the economic significance of the agricultural industry within Australia has increased. During the years of 2009–10 the gross value of Australian farm production was reported at $48.7 billion and generated 12% of the total GDP (FFN 2013). There has, however, been a dramatic decline in employed people in agricultural and pastoral industries from 12% to a mere 3% of the total Australian population (AG Workforce 2013). Presently, the Australian community still perceives the farming lifestyle as difficult and secluded (PICSE 2012). This community perception is extremely important to the agricultural industry. It is evident that despite economic growth, people do not find the rural lifestyle attractive and consequently are deterred from seeking a career in the industry.

The current community perception of agriculture within Australia is detrimental to the growth of the industry. The farming lifestyle is perceived as one of adversity and loneliness (PICSE 2012). The idea of the Australian farmer as being a 'simpleminded… poor and honest bushman' that Henry Lawson (1892) referred to in 1900, is still evident in the Australian community today. In reality, many farmers are at the leading edge of innovation, operate sophisticated management systems and adopt professional approaches to their work. Australian farmers are the most productive in the world on a per capita basis and are constantly adopting new technologies and innovations to improve efficiency and effectiveness of their production (Agriculture and Food Policy Reference Group 2006). The Australian public's view of agriculture belies the sectors modernity and productivity.

The direct effect of this attitude is a significant decline in young people seeking careers within the industry. This is reflected in fewer than 700 graduates being produced from agriculture science degrees for the year of 2012 (McLennan 2012). The limited number of graduates produced is expected to fill 4000 job opportunities created within the industry in 2012.

Marketing research undertaken by the Future Farming Network (2013) revealed that many students' perceptions of agriculture were 'generally positive'. When asked, however, to consider a future in the agricultural industry the consensus was that the industry did not offer long-term career options (PISCE 2012). The students believed that the agricultural industry comprised only of uneducated and backward people, had a lack of relevance in modern day society and provided an unappealing lifestyle, specifically of mental hardship and isolation (PICSE 2012).

The substantial decline in students seeking further education in agriculture has resulted in a reduction in educational institutions offering agricultural degrees from 15 to a mere seven in the decade of 2000 to 2010 (McLennan 2012). The lack of young people taking an interest in a career in agriculture is a direct consequence of the community perception that agriculture has limited career options and does not offer an idealistic lifestyle. Ultimately, the decline in people entering the industry will result in a loss in industry innovation, productivity and development.

The consequences of negative community perceptions on an industry can have devastating effects on its growth and development. The agricultural industry in Australia is facing the challenge of changing community perceptions that the industry does not provide profitable and successful career options. Continual decline in enrolments in further education in agriculture will hinder the industry, as there will be a significant labour shortage. Drawing comparisons to another industry, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) is also attempting to reconstruct their image to attract more recruits in order to safeguard the industry. Historically, the defence force within Australia has always been held in high-esteem. Similar to the idea of the Australian famer, the notion of young 'aussie battlers' and the Anzacs has been fundamental to the formation of a national identity within Australia.

In recent times, however, the ADF has come under public scrutiny, as the industry has been perceived as not providing equal acceptance of people with diverse race and sexuality (Scott 2011). Gender inequalities within the defence force have also come to light, which has contributed to the community's adverse perception of the industry (Scott 2011). The defence force has had to revise its campaign for new recruits by changing the

face of the defence force to an industry, which welcomes diversity in people (ADFA 2012). The industries' comparisons are strong as they exhibit the direct effects of community perceptions on an industry. Without the support of the community, industries such as the Australian Defence Force and the agricultural industry within Australia will suffer great consequences. The impacts of the community's perception of agriculture could stunt industry growth by limiting young people from entering the sector.

In addition to promoting agriculture as a viable career option to the Australian public, the industry must also transform the idea of agriculture. The success of the industry has not been adequately promoted to the Australian people. This is due to the media's portrayal of the recent droughts, which occurred across most of southern Australia from 2003 to 2009 (Keogh 2013). Desolate paddocks; listless, starving and dead livestock; and desperate and distraught farmers have been the scenes dominating the Australian media since the first devastating drought in 2003. Whilst people are being fed these images of desolation, the agricultural industry has had to cope with these climatic extremes.

The mechanisms adopted to cope with these extremes have resulted in agricultural innovation in methods of productions, which has put Australia on the 'forefront of world agricultural development' (Agriculture and Food Policy Reference Group 2006). Unfortunately, these agricultural improvements have not been promoted to the Australian public. Subsequently, the impression on the community is that the industry is constantly struggling. The droughts and other social factors have created a significant population shift from rural and remote areas to major urban centres and coastal communities.

In Australia, 85% of the population lives within 50 kilometres from the coast and this has had adverse consequences on rural local, educational, health and financial services. Non-metropolitan areas are perceived as isolated, offering less amenities and subsequently involving hardship for the people who want to live there. This substantial population shift has created a divide between urbanised and rural communities (Agriculture and Food Policy Reference Group 2006). Therefore, the perceptions of agriculture differ greatly from those from the rural community who are closely associated with the industry due to geographical positioning to those living in urbanised areas.

The perception of the urbanised community is often shaped by the media's portrayal of the industry and is limited by the lack of involvement in farming operations (VFF, undated). The significance of this is that the negative perceptions surrounding the agricultural industry are often from urban dwellers (VFF, undated). These negative perceptions cannot be ignored, as the urban community is a source for young people to receive further education in the agricultural industry. In addition, the majority of the consumers of agricultural products produced within Australia are located in urban and coastal communities. The perceptions of the urbanised community within Australia can also promote positive changes within the agricultural industry, such as, improvements to animal welfare and encouraging efficient practices.

Current community perceptions are paramount to the success of the agricultural industry. Australia is considered to have the potential to be the foodbowl of Australasia. This, however, cannot be achieved if people of the community do not consider the industry to provide viable career options (PISCE 2012). The federal and state governments of Australia must also reconsider their approach to funding allocations and support for farmers in Australia (Love 2012). The 2013–14 budget states that the Australian Government will allocate $99.4 million to new farm allowances 'to support farmers and their partners when they are in hardship' (DAFF 2013). This commitment has, however, been criticised as negotiations for this deal have been reportedly on going for the last five years (Wimborne 2013). Critics are asking how long will it take for the Australian Government to make serious commitments to agriculture and recognise the importance of the industry? The lack of support from the Australian Government will impede the industry from financial assistance and will also create the impression to the community that the industry is not valued in modern day society. This perception is extremely important to the industry

as it can deter people from entering the industry and can insinuate to the community that the industry in its entirety is struggling.

The Australian Government has also cut costs to public funding for agricultural research and development from $1 billion to $716 million in 2008 and reduced the funding a further $150 million in 2012 (Neales 2013). This decrease in funding will ultimately result in a reduction in available jobs and a loss of industry innovation in farming operations and production. Without the government's support the industry can be seen as unprogressive. This idea could further advance negative perceptions of agriculture to the community. Consequently, the idea that the industry is 'behind the times' would be promoted to the community, which would ultimately deter young people from entering the industry.

The Australian community has the ability to push for changes within the agricultural industry. It is, therefore, important for the industry to value the community's perceptions and to consider them when adopting changes to the industry. Animal welfare and the ethical treatment of animals in the agricultural industry is a contentious issue. There is a strong community perception that animal welfare is not a consideration in agricultural practices. There has been consistent opposition to farming practices in almost every sector of the agricultural industry. The use of sow stalls; mulesing and slaughtering of bobby calves are all factors in farming, which the community has opposed.

Animal welfare groups, such as Animals Australia, are key drivers in the fight for animal rights and have undertaken effective marketing campaigns to push for change in farming practices (Animals Australia 2013). Consequently, leading chain supermarket Coles has taken a stand on animal welfare within the agricultural industry. Presently, Coles promotes their supply of RSPCA approved chicken, turkey and pork, only supplied from sow-stall-free pork producers and beef with no added hormones (Coles 2013).

Concerns over animal welfare also caused devastating effects to the live export trade in 2011. The industry was brought to a complete halt overnight as a result of documented cases of animal cruelty in countries where the animals were being processed. The strength and significance of the community was felt as the industry that provides $996.5 million to the Australian economy was stopped (DAFF 2013). Federal Agricultural Minister, Joe Ludwig, stated in regards to the live export ban that 'the Australian community made it clear it would not support a trade in which these things (alleged animal cruelty) occurred' (ABC 2011).

Rebuilding community confidence into the animal welfare situation within the industry is of paramount importance. Consequently every sector

of the agricultural industry has had animal welfare legislation implemented and the Australian Government has instigated the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS) to ensure animal welfare and the ethical treatment of animals is a priority to agricultural producers within Australia (DAFF 2013). The challenge facing the agricultural industry from the animal welfare issue is proof of the community's ability to force change within sectors of the industry.

The significance and strength of the community's perception of agriculture within Australia has the capability to push for change within the industry. The agricultural industry's ability to increase

production to feed an ever-increasing population is a challenge facing the whole sector. Research and development in agriculture has led to the scientific innovation of gene engineering and consequently the creation of genetically modified (GM) crops and gene technology to improve the efficiency of animal production.

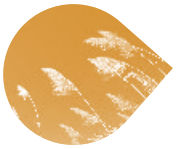
There is, however, significant community opposition to these scientific innovations and consequently farmers have been wary of adopting these new technologies (Cormick 2007). The main reasons behind farmers' resistance to the use of GM crops are market access limitations and consumer concerns (Cormick 2007). Genetic

modification within crops has been scientifically proven to increase yields and to reduce reliance on the use of pesticides and insecticides (Whitman 2000). Acceptance of these technologies has been limited as community concerns regarding the safety and environmental impact from the growth of these crops have been raised (Cormick 2007).

Community perceptions have the ability to slow the progress of scientific innovation within the industry. The lack of acceptance of these technologies will impede scientists who are attempting to initiate the technology into plant and animal engineering. This technology could provide solutions to the problem of how to feed an ever-growing population. The Australian community's perception of agriculture has the ability to change practices within the industry and also to slow down scientific innovation within the industry. Community support and encouragement for the agricultural industry is paramount to the development and advancement of agricultural innovation.

The agricultural industry within Australia cannot underestimate the strength and significance of the community's perception of agriculture. It has been proven that negative community perceptions have the power to force change of on-farm practices, to limit scientific innovation within the industry and to deter young people from seeking a future in agriculture. The industry has been required to constantly revise its industry practices and constantly change and adapt to the challenges facing agriculture. Countries, such as Canada, have also had to consider community concerns as changing consumer and societal demands are influencing change throughout the whole agriculture and agrifood system.

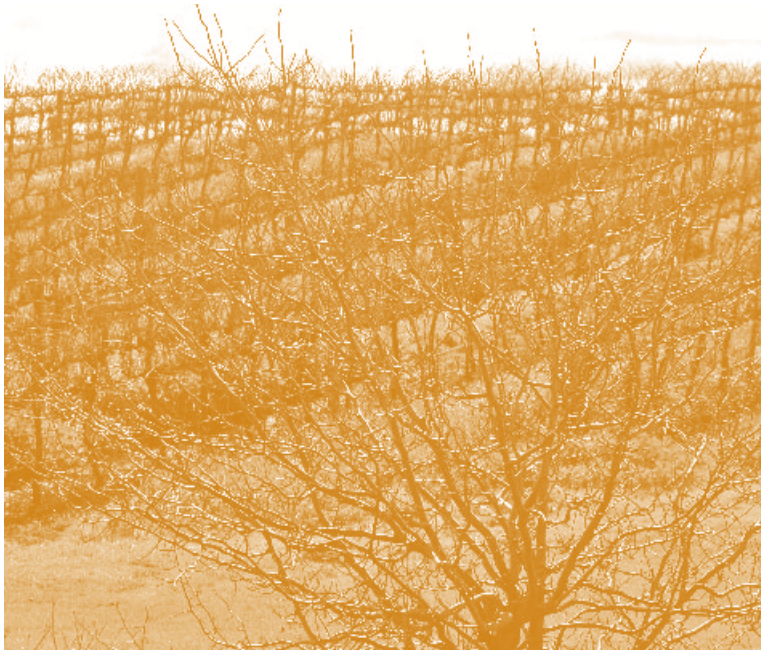
The agricultural industry within Canada recognises the importance of the community perception of agriculture. The Canadian industry is adapting to consumer demands, which involves producing more environmentally friendly food, and food that addresses the consumer's values. Agricultural industries will always have to consider community perceptions and the impact these perceptions have on the industry. The challenge arises of how to change negative community perceptions in attempts to attract more people into the industry and also how to bridge the gap between urbanised and rural communities. The misconception that the agricultural industry is backward, consists only of uneducated farmers, and does not provide long-term career options need to change. Possible solutions to this include recognising that the industry has a responsibility to market agriculture. Urbanised agricultural industry professionals need to step out from behind farm gates and begin to inform communities of the production operations going on behind their food. This will ultimately create an understanding between consumer and producer, and enable a dialogue over important issues facing agriculture.



It is evident in this modern-day society that marketing tools are extremely effective in promoting an industry to the community. This is observed in the efficacy of the marketing campaigns undertaken by the mining sector, and recently ADFA, in their ability to attract new employees. Through the promotion of the agricultural industry within Australia, the idea that the industry provides viable career options will ultimately attract young people into the industry. It is clear that with an increase in the amount of young people, the industry will be able to develop further and innovation in the production of food will ensue.

Community perceptions that the agricultural industry only offers on-farm jobs and involves a lifestyle of isolation and hardship will ultimately change as people are increasingly exposed to different sectors of the industry. The community as a whole needs to become more aware of the viable and diversified career options offered within the industry. High school career advisers from both rural and urban schools need to encourage students to consider agriculture and agriculturally related degrees as pathways to successful and profitable careers. Within agriculture people are given the opportunity to work in environmental conservation, international markets, international development, business, and scientific research and innovation. The opportunities within the industry are endless and this needs to be promoted to the community. The face of agriculture needs to change in order to promote its profitability, sustainability and innovation.

Community concerns are of paramount importance when considering the agricultural industry within Australia. Negative perceptions, such as the idea that the agricultural industry is 'behind the times' or doesn't offer any long-term career options contribute to the consistently declining university enrolments into agricultural degrees across Australia. The lack of interest from young people in the industry will ultimately result in a loss of industry innovation and further hinder the industry by deterring people from seeking employment within agriculture. Effective marketing techniques need to be employed to change the face of agriculture. Agriculture within Australia needs to become the image of innovation, prosperity and sustainability. As observed in effective marketing campaigns undertaken by ADFA, the promotion of the agriculture industry will encourage young people to consider a career in the agricultural industry as a viable option. Career advisers in secondary schools across rural and urban areas need to put forward the idea to students that agriculture is a prosperous industry, which offers a myriad of career options.



Through the use of clever marketing strategies the industry should provide an insight into on-farm and processing operations, which are undertaken in the production of agricultural products. This will ultimately increase community awareness of the industry and help to bridge the gap between urban and rural communities. The knowledge generated from these campaigns will help the Australian public to understand the necessary practices required in agricultural practice.

Community perceptions have the strength and significance to push for change on-farm and in production operations as observed in the attitudes towards animal welfare and the ethical treatment of animals. The changes and adaptations adopted by the industry have been positive in regards to making animal ethics a prime concern to all

producers. The emphasis now lies on gaining community confidence in the industry and promoting positive perceptions of agriculture. Agricultural industries across the world need to constantly adapt to the changes in consumer and societal demands. The idea that the agricultural industry is a flexible and ever-changing industry needs to be shared with the community. The hope for the industry is that people will perceive agriculture as a sustainable, profitable, innovative and hallmark industry of Australia. This

perception will ensure the success and prosperity of the industry.

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About the Author

Jessica Fleetwood is 24 years' old and currently in her 4th year of studying a double degree in agricultural science and business at La Trobe University in Bundoora. She is also doing her diploma in languages in French. Jessica was born and grew up in the city in Melbourne. Her passion for the country developed from casual work in the thoroughbred industry in her early teens. Since then she has studied wool classing and been exposed to many sectors of the agricultural industry. Jessica aims to work on the marketing and promotion of the agricultural industry within Australia – to develop greater understanding between city and country communities.

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