



Victorian
Farmers
Federation

SUBMISSION

Future of Agriculture Training Review

October 2021

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1

To promote agriculture/horticulture studies in Primary and Secondary schooling, conduct on-farm excursions to increase interest and numbers of TAFE/VET enrolments, particularly in areas of low enrolment uptake.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Ensure quality of TAFE/VET resources and teaching by consulting with practicing farmers, utilise their experience in the delivery of classes, and integrate on-farm experience in the delivery of lessons.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Commit to funding courses for agricultural workers in farm business, truck and machinery operation and first aid.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Improve the accessibility of agriculture and horticulture courses by removing the higher education trigger for supported places.

RECOMMENDATION 5

That the Victorian Government investigate transport solutions for isolated students including access to school bus routes and subsidised travel.

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) welcomes the opportunity to submit in response to The Future of Agriculture Training Review being undertaken by the Victorian State Government. Agriculture is an industry of vital importance to Victoria and the ongoing modernisation of TAFE and VET training is necessary to ensure continued success.

The VFF is the leading advocacy group for farmers throughout Victoria and strives to ensure Victorian agriculture remains the driving economic force of the state. Victoria's agricultural production accounts for over \$14 billion of Victoria's economy and over 25 per cent of the State's exports per annum. Victoria's farmers produce high quality food and fibre and are continually seeking to improve both quality and output with expertise, technology and ingenuity.

In consultation with VFF members, Agriculture College and TAFE/VET teachers, numerous strategies and perspectives have been drawn from, including resources such as the 2012 ETC Inquiry into Agricultural Training and Education, with the intention of improving enrolment numbers into TAFE/VET colleges. Consultation has also sought to explore how these institutions can support Victoria's agriculture industry, as well as improve the curriculum to ensure TAFE/VET graduates have the necessary skills to meaningfully contribute to the agricultural workforce.

RECOMMENDATION 1
To promote agriculture/horticulture studies in Primary and Secondary schooling, conduct on-farm excursions to increase TAFE/VET enrolments, particularly in areas of low enrolment uptake.

Labour and skills shortages in Victorian agriculture are highly prevalent. Alarming, where the industry is presently grappling with short and long term staff shortages there is also low agriculture/horticulture enrolments into TAFE/VET colleges, particularly in the Barwon and South Gippsland regions. One way to increase the number of TAFE/VET students is exposure to commercial farms and rural life throughout primary and secondary school, as well as ensuring secondary school curriculum and careers advice effectively promotes agriculture/horticulture study at TAFE/VET colleges as a positive, meaningful and exciting career choice.

For many students in Melbourne and major regional centres, their only exposure to rural life and agriculture is through tales of hardship related to bushfires and drought in the mainstream press. With the recent updates in secondary school curriculum ensuring a heightened focus on sustainability however, opportunities to introduce food technology or science students to successful commercial farms in peri-urban areas through excursions or virtual visits, will encourage an understand of and affinity with agriculture. Positive experiences on farms will increase the likelihood of secondary students engaging in agriculture/horticulture study with TAFE/VET colleges. A model for how this experience can be achieved is demonstrated in the [Kids to Ag](#) program run by the VFF.

Increasing resources, funding and the number of teachers for agriculture/horticulture studies in a growing number of secondary schools also presents a direct method of ensuring greater numbers of TAFE/VET agriculture/horticulture students. With initial and ongoing funding by the Victorian

Government, these channels of integrating secondary students into higher education and the workforce can become solidified.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Ensure quality of TAFE/VET resources and teaching by consulting with practicing farmers, utilise their experience in the delivery of classes, and integrate on-farm experience in the delivery of lessons.

Where TAFE/VET training for agriculture can be most improved is in the quality, relevance and effectiveness of training. In consultation with VFF members involved in both the farming and education sectors, it became apparent that TAFE/VET teaching and learning can be conducted more efficiently and effectively on farm, and in practical scenarios as opposed to in classrooms. The Victorian Government should consider the value gained from hands-on and practical learning and integrate periodic instruction from practicing farmers into the TAFE/VET curriculum.

Whether it is in the completion of skill set courses utilised by GOTAFE for example, or in the completion of agriculture/horticulture certificates and diplomas, professionals in the agriculture/horticulture field are able to provide knowledge from best practice and lived experience to complement the in class/online training and reading. Given that different commodities have varying skill sets, periodic specialist classes reduces the burden on teachers to be aware of best practice for each commodity and allows students to receive expert knowledge relevant to their interests.

TAFE/VET courses such as the *22539VIC Course in Introductory Shearing* is a model of how best to utilise expert knowledge and farmer developed resources, with maximum enrolment numbers already reached. Commissioning modern training resources for other commodity groups (pigs, poultry, grains etc.) and employing greater numbers of skilled and knowledgeable teachers with on farm practical learning and farmer taught classes will ensure the ongoing relevance and applicability of TAFE/VET agricultural training.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Commit to funding courses for agricultural workers in farm business, truck and machinery operation and first aid.

To ensure continual upskilling within the agricultural workforce, the Victorian Government should commit to funding VET/TAFE courses such as first aid, truck and machinery operation as well as offering courses such as the [Certificate IV in Agribusiness](#) and the [Advanced Diploma of Agribusiness Management](#) more broadly, per the [VFF 2021-22 supplementary budget submission](#). With these and other supplementary courses being made freely available in a variety of locations to all Victorians regardless of their previous level of study, farmers and farm workers would have the opportunity to up skill to ensure they are able to effectively manage their farms, employees and finances.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Improve the accessibility of agriculture and horticulture courses by removing the higher education trigger for supported places.

RECOMMENDATION 5

That the Victorian Government investigate transport solutions for isolated students including access to school bus routes and subsidised travel.

By guaranteeing that the cost of further study will not be a prohibitive factor in ongoing skill acquisition for farmers and rural workers alike, there is an increased likelihood for continued engagement with the TAFE/VET sector and a circular mode of knowledge sharing amongst students can occur. With greater access to knowledge and resources not only from TAFE/VET teachers, but from experienced students themselves who are continually engaging with higher education, the richness of the learning experience, sharing of value adding knowledge and increase in community engagement will be beneficial to students, the broader community and Victoria's economic growth. For those commencing students and farmers who are in isolated locations, transport solutions such as subsidised public transport should also be appropriately funded to ensure engagement and ease of access for all potential students.

Farming is an integral part of the state's economy and environment. The VFF has made the recommendations in this submission in an effort to ensure the longevity and continued success of Victorian TAFE/VET colleges and our agricultural/horticultural industries.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission. The VFF remains committed to assisting the Department of Education and Training in the development of The Future of Agriculture Training Review and welcomes and encourages industry engagement.

Yours sincerely,



Emma Germano
President
Victorian Farmers Federation