

Relentlessly Positive

A review of programs to promote agriculture and affect policy change

A report for



By Colin de Grussa

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Scholar Contact Details

Colin de Grussa
11 Cannes Parade
Castletown WA 6450
Mobile: +61 427 984 611
Email: colin.degrussa@gmail.com

In submitting this report, the Scholar has agreed to Nuffield Australia publishing this material in its edited form.

NUFFIELD AUSTRALIA Contact Details

Nuffield Australia
Telephone: (02) 9463 9229
Mobile: 0431 438 684
Email: enquiries@nuffield.com.au
Address: PO Box 1021, North Sydney, NSW 2059

Executive Summary

According to branding expert Craig Davis, in Australia today only 0.6% of the population is directly involved in agriculture compared to 14% 100 years ago (Walmsley, A. 2014).

The growth of other industries over a similar period has seen a relative decline in Australia's reliance on agriculture which is consistent with trends in other developed countries. An important point though, is that Australia's agricultural output as a proportion of the economy is among the highest in the OECD (ABS, 2012).

Historically, Australian governments have employed a range of agricultural policy measures to maintain and stabilise farmer returns, including marketing and price support schemes and subsidies to reduce input costs. However, these assistance measures distorted resource use across farms and weakened farmers' incentives to find better ways of managing risk and improving productivity. Moreover, government assistance served to offset 'normal' adjustment pressures, impeding ongoing structural change and preventing more efficient farmers from expanding their operations (Gray, EM, Oss-Emer, M and Sheng, Y 2014).

Of course, various interest groups and lobbying entities have a role to play in influencing the policy making process and consumers as well. Marketing campaigns from corporations will often play upon the consumers' relative lack of understanding of modern agriculture.

The modern consumer is presented with a great deal of information, some would say it's information overload. There is a trend in recent years for much of this information to come from internet based sources. The validity of these sources is often questionable and in many cases part of a broader marketing strategy. When it comes to food and food production, quite often emotive language and "scare tactics" are used to present some of the information.

Nathanael Johnson, a journalist for online environmental magazine Grist, concluded after researching Genetically Modified (GM) crops that consumers had become alienated from the food system. In his words "GM has become a symbol for the corporatization and homogenization of the agriculture industry" and the debate has actually become disconnected from the GM perspective and is more a discussion of the corporatization of food production. Johnson also says the consumer has become disenchanted with large-scale agriculture and needs to find a way to reconnect (Johnson, N. pers. comm.).

A Rabobank survey in 2014 found that of the participants in the survey, 17 percent said they had never been on a farm and two-thirds had visited a farm less than three times in their life. Whilst careers in agriculture rated lower than many other occupations, it was pleasing to note that more than 90 percent of respondents saw farming and food production as very important to Australia (Rabobank, 2014).

Given the relatively small population in Australia who are directly involved in agriculture, how then can public policy be influenced and keep consumers and schools informed about this vital industry?

A number of different organisations were approached as part of this research, who are working to improve the links between agriculture and the community, in a variety of different ways. Much of the work they do is transferrable and could be replicated here in Australia.

The German FNL organisation describes itself as "an organisation to promote sustainable agriculture". It comprises 44 members made up of industry, trade and other associations from the agricultural sector in Germany. If an urgent issue in the agri-political space arises, they can provide research and information but the job of dealing with the issue lies with lobby organisations like Deutscher Bauernverband or DBV. This distinction is important because it keeps FNL 'out of the limelight', helping to maintain a perception independence (Kraus, Dr. A., pers. comm., 2014).

The California Farm Bureau Federation (CFBF) has developed a program called the California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom. The program is run by a small group in the CFBF who work closely with teachers and industry organisations to develop the materials used and to provide teachers and students with a complete package including all information and lesson plans for them.

The British National Farmers Union (NFU) has worked hard to try and position themselves as the trusted source for agriculture related information for the British media. The mantra of the media and communications team was best summed up by Senior Campaigns Adviser, Gemma Fitzpatrick who said that they must be "relentlessly positive in all that they do".

The media team receive around 300 telephone calls per month from journalists seeking information on agriculture related issues. Ms. Fitzpatrick emphasised the point that the evidence based and expert knowledge the NFU have on all agriculture industries is substantial, and that the media recognise this. Interestingly, whilst the NFU is indeed a lobby organisation, their information is viewed by those in the media as being balanced and credible (Fitzpatrick, G., pers. comm., 2014).

The statistics are pretty clear. Australian agriculture's connection with an increasingly middle class and urbanised society is weakening, and this population is influencing policy makers. Time will not change this and the industry needs to act quickly to address this growing divide.

Importantly, in recent years, communities are asking more questions about where and how their food and fibre is produced. It is the authors' belief that this desire for information and understanding presents a fantastic opportunity to "inform the masses" – and a way to make that happen needs to be found.

In many ways, the first and most important role for the industry is to significantly improve its links with education. It is absolutely critical that children across Australia are given a clear and balanced understanding of food and fibre production, and the many opportunities which exist (or don't yet exist) in this exciting industry.

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Foreword

It's no secret that agriculture in Australia is under pressure from a number of influences. The climate presents its usual challenges each year, and the ageing of our farmers is a perennial topic of discussion amongst our fellow agriculturalists. Lobby groups struggle with fewer members and a constant battle to remain relevant in a changing agricultural landscape. Interest groups rally the masses against the "evils of factory farming" and "corporate agriculture". Most farmers, rightly, are focussed on ensuring the continued viability of their businesses through improving practices, adapting and adopting new technologies, understanding their consumer and enhancing production and quality of their produce.

Agriculture in Australia has been described as the next 'boom' industry and the 'food bowl of Asia'. No matter the merits of these descriptions, the industry should be in a very good place to provide high-quality agricultural products to neighbouring nations.

Our governments, both state and federal, should play a key role in enabling the boom for agriculture in Australia through genuine engagement and collaborative policy processes with farmers and industry players. However, how many of us are truly engaged in the policy debate? Is this solely the job of our farm lobby groups? If it is, why are fewer farmers renewing their membership or joining in the first instance? Are there other ways to influence policy for the betterment of our agriculture industry? What's the role of the community in this and does community opinion or understanding really matter?

In an attempt to find answers to these questions, I travelled to Germany, Belgium, the UK, USA and New Zealand, meeting with people from all walks of life, variously engaged with agriculture, politics, lobbying or consuming. This was an opportunity to meet and discuss firsthand the importance of the industry, consumer perceptions and the many different ways other nations are engaging in the formation of policies to enhance their agricultural industries.

This report will not be a review and comparison of the various farm lobby groups or their methods around the world and in Australia. Others before me have done a wonderful job researching and comparing these entities and most recently the Australian Farm Institute (AFI) produced an excellent report on this subject.

As an industry, agriculture has not been good at telling society what we do and why we do it, which is why our increasingly urbanised communities still have a very 'grandfather' view of agriculture as an old, low tech industry. Our challenge is to find a way to tell our story; a challenge which will require resources, cooperation and a shift in thinking. Major players in the world of agriculture must be a part of this as well as farmers themselves.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my sponsors, CBH Group and CSBP for their generous support of my scholarship and the Nuffield program.

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I'd like to extend a huge thank you to:

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Casey Gudel, Colleen Cecil, Dave Kranz, CFBF California

David Martell, Alumni of the California Agricultural Leadership Foundation

As any Nuffield Scholar knows, the pressures on family whilst you are away are enormous and I'd especially like to thank my family and friends for holding the fort whilst I was away.

Finally, to team Brazil GFP; Chris, Nick, Bob, Lisa, Michael, Keshav, Mel and Lionel – thanks for putting up with me over the time we shared in our mad cap round the world tour, the friendships formed are for life.

Abbreviations

CFBF:	California Farm Bureau Federation
CFFAIC:	California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom
DAFF:	Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
DBV:	Deutsche Bauernverband
FNL:	Fördergemeinschaft Nachhaltige Landwirtschaft E.V.
GM:	Genetically Modified
NFU:	National Farmers' Union
OECD:	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

Objectives

The objectives of this report include:

- Quantify statistics in relation to agriculture in Australia.
- Examine some of the consumer influence groups.
- Provide an overview of recent surveys on the understanding of agriculture in schools and other educational institutions.
- Examine the “consumer”.
- Provide a description and information from some of the entities or programs working to improve the understanding of agriculture in other nations.
- Identify and provide recommendations for potential options in Australia.

Chapter 1: Background

1.1 By the numbers

According to branding expert Craig Davis, in Australia today only 0.6% of the population is directly involved in agriculture compared to 14% 100 years ago (Walmsley, A. 2014). The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) reported a decline in employment in farming and fishing of almost 40% in the years from 2000 to 2012 (DAFF, 2013).

The growth of other industries over a similar period has seen a relative decline in Australia's reliance on agriculture which is consistent with trends in other developed countries. An important point though, is that Australia's agricultural output as a proportion of the economy is among the highest in the OECD (ABS, 2012).

1.2 Public policy

Professor Wayne Hayes, Ph.D says that "Public policy is a purposeful and consistent course of action produced as a response to a perceived problem of a constituency, formulated by a specific political process, and adopted, implemented, and enforced by a public agency" (Hayes, 2014).

So, policy is the outcome of a process which has identified a problem (or perhaps an opportunity). In other words, it is an attempt to offer a means of resolving the issue or capturing the advantage of the opportunity.

Historically, Australian governments have employed a range of agricultural policy measures to maintain and stabilise farmer returns, including marketing and price support schemes and subsidies to reduce input costs. However, these assistance measures distorted resource use across farms and weakened farmers' incentives to find better ways of managing risk and improving productivity. Moreover, government assistance served to offset 'normal' adjustment pressures, impeding ongoing structural change and preventing more efficient farmers from expanding their operations. (Gray, EM, Oss-Emer, M and Sheng, Y 2014)

In the political world, policies come from a number of different processes. Political parties will have certain 'ideals' which they will use as the basis to formulate some of their key policies on particular subjects. Party members may also contribute to the formation of policies through processes determined by, and specific to, those parties. Particular issues or opportunities may arise which a government needs to deal with and so a policy will be formulated to address this.

1.3 Under the influence

Various interest groups and lobbying entities have a role to play in influencing the policy making process and consumers as well. Marketing campaigns from corporations will often play upon the consumers' relative lack of understanding of modern agriculture.

Figure 1 is an image captured from a web based promotional video for the Isagenix range of food supplements. This video takes aim at agriculture telling viewers that "we have poisoned our water, we are poisoning our air, we have poisoned our food and we're doing that to allow industry to advance". Further the video goes on to tell viewers that modern pesticides are "sterilizing our topsoil" (Isagenix 2015).



Figure 1: Isagenix web video

The Animals Australia website, shown in Figure 2 also highlights the emotive language used by such interest groups to capture the attention of a populous, who is largely poorly informed about modern agriculture.



Figure 2: Animals Australia website

1.4 The consumer

The modern consumer is presented with a great deal of information, some would say it's information overload. There is a trend in recent years for much of this information to come from internet based sources. The validity of these sources is often questionable and in many cases part of a broader marketing strategy. When it comes to food and food production, quite often emotive language and "scare tactics" are used to present some of the information.

In Germany, 97% of consumers regard environmental sustainability as being very important to them, whilst only 56% of those consumers rate improved yields for farmers as being important. Two thirds of German consumers know the meaning of sustainability but can't explain this in terms of agriculture (Kraus, Dr. A., pers. comm., 2014).

Nathanael Johnson, a journalist for online environmental magazine Grist, concluded after researching Genetically Modified (GM) crops that consumers had become alienated from the food system. Johnson says humans have an amazing and efficient food production system but people don't trust food producers anymore. In his words "GM has become a symbol for the corporatization and homogenization of the agriculture industry" and the debate has actually become disconnected from the GM perspective and is more a discussion of the corporatization of food production. Johnson also says the consumer has become disenchanted with large-scale agriculture and needs to find a way to reconnect (Johnson, N. pers. comm., 2014))

1.5 Schools

The school systems must also play a part in communicating what the agriculture industry does and why it is important.

A 2014 survey conducted by Rabobank, highlights the growing disconnect between school children in metropolitan Australia and the agriculture industry. 77 percent of the city teenagers surveyed said they know little or nothing about our farming and food production systems.

Of the participants in the survey, 17 percent said they had never been on a farm and two-thirds had visited a farm less than three times in their life. Whilst careers in agriculture rated lower than many other occupations, it was pleasing to note that more than 90 percent of respondents saw farming and food production as very important to Australia (Rabobank, 2014).

In a 2011 survey of students enrolling in science courses at the University of Queensland it was found that promoting a general awareness of agriculture, highlighting the diversity of opportunities, earning potential and importance of agriculture to society were identified as potential motivators for young people to take up an agricultural career. This survey also found that students were making career decisions in early secondary school and that 54 percent were influenced by their parents whilst 36 percent were influenced by people working in their chosen area of study. (Miller, D., Allen, W. and Kleinschmidt, C., 2011)

Whilst there are certainly positives in some of the results from the surveys above, there is also a clear need for the agricultural industry to improve its links with education in Australia. Much of the advancements in technology in agriculture have happened rapidly but have not been communicated well

Chapter 2: Is there anybody out there?

The author travelled to three continents for the research behind this report, meeting with many incredible people and organisations. In Germany, the author met with the German farmer's union, Deutsche Bauernverband (DBV), Fördergemeinschaft Nachhaltige Landwirtschaft e.V. (FNL) an industry group and with representatives from the giant Bayer organisation.

In Brussels, the author met with representatives of the NFU's British Agriculture Bureau (BAB), who represent the UK's agriculture industry in the European Parliament. In addition, Dr. Andreas Schneider, a representative of the European People's Party in Brussels provided insights into the workings of the European Parliament and issues surrounding agriculture.

Time was spent with the British National Farmers Union (NFU) head office in Stoneleigh Park, meeting their communications, membership, media, IT and graphic design teams and gained a very good appreciation for the work this large organisation does.

In New Orleans, U.S.A. the author attended the Farm to Fork International conference. Held over three days, this conference featured concurrent sessions and presentations from a number of experts in agriculture and food production from the U.S. and abroad. Some of the presenters included founder of FoodTank, Danielle Nierenberg. Foodtank's mission is "to educate, inspire, advocate, and create change by spotlighting and supporting environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable ways of alleviating hunger, obesity, and poverty and creating networks of people, organizations, and content to push for food system change." (FoodTank 2017). Danielle Nierenberg provided insights into creating a movement for change.

In California, the author visited the Sacramento offices of the California Farm Bureau Federation and met with a number of representatives of the organisation's team who provided insights into the various programs they run. Of particular interest were their education and communication programs. In addition, the author visited the California Department of Food and Agriculture's regulatory agency in Sacramento, California and discussed some of the initiatives they have developed in terms of education and promotion.

In the Salinas Valley in California the author met with David Martella, an alumni of the California Agricultural Leadership Foundation. David discussed some of the programs undertaken by the foundation including the very successful Washington, D.C. Educational Fellowship Program. This program, which commenced in 1982, aims to educate Washington, D.C.-based decision makers about current issues and challenges facing California's farmers and ranchers, as well as foster open communication between those producing food and fibre with federal entities.

Given the relatively small population in Australia who are directly involved in agriculture, how then do we influence public policy and keep the consumer and our schools informed about this vital industry?

As a result of the many meetings and various organisations three “case studies” have been provided which offer some potential for implementation in Australia. Much of the work they do is transferrable and could be replicated here in Australia for the local industry.

1.1 Fördergemeinschaft Nachhaltige Landwirtschaft e.V. (FNL)

The German FNL organisation describes itself as "an organisation to promote sustainable agriculture". It comprises 44 members made up of industry, trade and other associations from the agricultural sector in Germany. Figure 3 below provides an overview of the structure of this organisation.

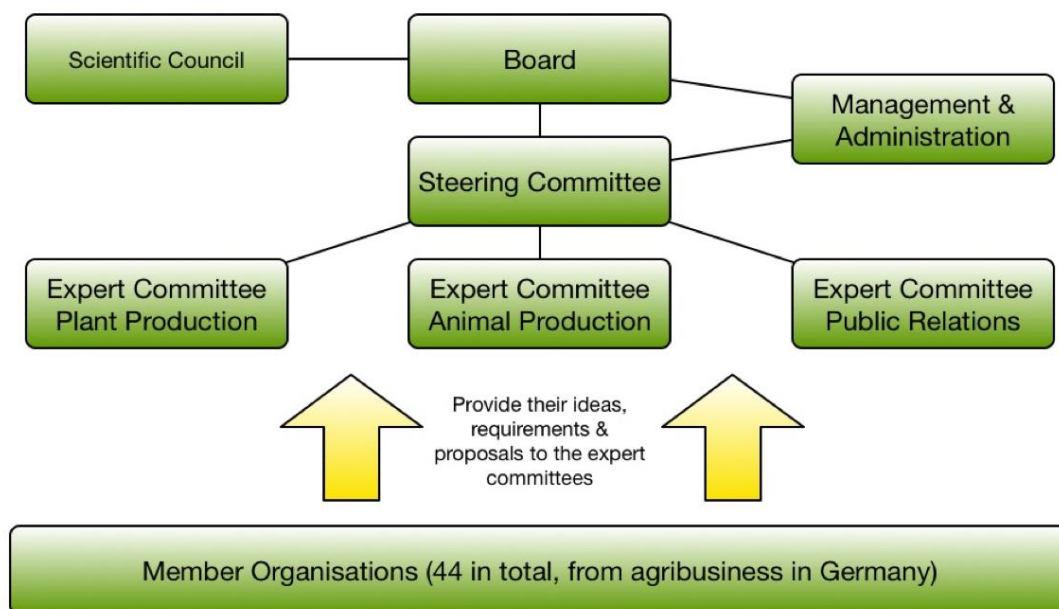


Figure 3: Structure of FNL organisation

Members of FNL contribute financially and this is based upon their means and their interest in contributing. The minimum fee is around €1000 but a number of key organisations pay much larger fees. The primary contributors to FNL are crop protection companies as they have the resources and are also most affected by negative publicity stemming from a lack of understanding of modern agriculture. These organisations are then also able to sit on the board, which is kept small for efficiency. The steering committee decides on the main strategies after receiving input from the expert panels. This committee is larger in makeup than the board and smaller members have a voice at this level (Kraus, Dr A., pers. comm., 2014).

FNL's main objectives are to:

- Increase trust in modern agriculture.
- enhance the community's understanding of sustainability.
- make communication more visible and better heard.
- foster dialogue to gain more participation.
- turn facts and scientific knowledge into emotions.
- tackle and dissolve the "good vs. bad" message surrounding agriculture.

Dr. Anton Kraus, CEO of FNL was keen to point out that the organisation had to, in his words, "replace the traditional emitter – receiver" mode of communication which was prevalent in relation to agricultural issues. The organisation needed to generate "dialogue" on issues which meant informing people through discussion and interaction with the industry. A key element of this model is the use of real farmers as ambassadors of their industry. Importantly Dr. Kraus emphasised that this did not mean taking society to the farm, but rather taking the farmer to society. The "ambassador" program was in its infancy when the author met with Dr. Kraus who noted that they currently had only seven farmer ambassadors from approximately 300,000 farmers in Germany. Farmers who utilise modern and good practices are identified and asked if they would like to come on board. The organisation tries to maintain a "distance" from lobby organisations when choosing these ambassadors as well (Kraus, Dr. A, pers. comm., 2014).

CEO of FNL Dr. Anton Kraus emphasised the point that FNL is "not the fire brigade" - they take a longer-term view and aim to affect change over a longer period. If an urgent issue in the agripolitical space arises, they can provide research and information but the job of dealing with the issue lies with lobby organisations like Deutscher Bauernverband or DBV. This distinction is important because it keeps FNL 'out of the limelight', helping to maintain a perception independence. Another key point to note is that FNL does do a lot of research and 'fact gathering' which members have access to. This in part helps to maintain the consistent and accurate dissemination of agriculture related information (Kraus, Dr. A., pers. comm., 2014).

1.2 California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom

In California, the California Farm Bureau Federation (CFBF) has developed a program called the California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom. The program grew from the CFBF's education branch in 1980's, and became a separate entity once demand had grown for the resources they provide. Stephanie Etcheverria emphasised that whilst relatively small, the program aims to reach as many students as possible in schools. The program uses all sorts of mechanisms to speak to kids including publications in student newspapers (which costs nothing to distribute but reaches a potential readership of about two million students). There are around seven million students from Kindergarten to year 12 in California. The program is run by a small group in the CFBF who work closely with teachers and industry organisations to develop the materials used and to provide teachers and students with a complete package including all information and lesson plans for them. Teachers are then able to easily implement these programs within their existing classes and provide students with a much greater understanding of the agricultural industry in

California. Figure 4 below shows examples of the comprehensive range of resources produced by the program.



Figure 4: Examples of material produced by CFFAIC

The small team behind the Foundation produces a broad range of materials which are ‘teacher ready’ making the likely use of these resources higher. The program’s organisers recognised early that building strong relations with teachers was key to being able to reach more students (Etcheverria, S., pers. Comm. 2014).

Background information is gathered together twice yearly from commodity groups and other sources to provide the base resource for putting together the lesson plans and other curriculum related materials. Groups of teachers review the material and determine its usability and suitability and it is then compiled into a teacher resource book. These teacher groups also review the material in the context of budgetary conditions for educators as well (Etcheverria, S. pers. Comm., 2014).

The foundation’s team visit around six teaching symposiums throughout the year, covering not just subject based forums but also forums for home schooling, after school care and private schools as well. At these forums, they undertake presentations on the foundation and to complement this they also have display booths where teachers and others can view and take copies of educational resources. Importantly, they present material on the scale and importance of agriculture to California’s economy, often surprising many educators. They also work hard to reinforce the message that agriculture is easy to teach and need not be daunting to the teachers, even though the teachers may themselves not come from a position of knowledge in terms of the industry (Etcheverria, S., pers. Comm., 2014).

A monthly electronic newsletter, called *Cream of the Crop*, is also produced which reaches 14,000 teachers and is also sent to every school principal in California. The principals will also forward this on to their teachers. This newsletter includes a “teacher feature” which highlights the work of one teacher who is using the program’s resources, and includes any new material which is not yet in the bi-annual teacher resource guide (shown Figure 4). The newsletter also highlights any upcoming farm days or “outreach” grants to ensure teachers are aware of these (Etcheverria, S., pers. comm., 2014).

For the 25-year anniversary of the program, the team visited 25 schools in San Francisco with 350 volunteers taking produce and live animals. This event, whilst very complex logistically, was very well-received by the local community and viewed by organisers as a good effort to build the connection between the agriculture industry and the urban population (Etcheverria, S., pers. comm., 2014).

In another effort to reach students, the Foundation’s team also exhibited at a careers expo to promote the numerous (and exciting) opportunities for employment in agriculture and its related industries. The display included 25 professionals employed in agriculture who spoke to students about their careers and the multi-disciplinary nature of agriculture (Etcheverria, S. pers. comm., 2014).

1.3 NFU UK - relentlessly positive

The British National Farmers Union (NFU) has worked hard to try and position themselves as the trusted source for agriculture related information for the British media. The mantra of the media and communications team was best summed up by Senior Campaigns Adviser, Gemma Fitzpatrick who said that they must be “relentlessly positive in all that they do”.



Figure 5: Gemma Fitzpatrick, senior campaigns advisor at British NFU

The NFU media team is composed of three people with a senior adviser. The team monitors all media including radio, television, print media and electronic media. As well as in house monitoring they also utilise a paid media monitoring service, although they did say that this service does not capture everything mainly due to constraints around timing (Fitzpatrick, G., pers. comm., 2014).

The media team receive around 300 telephone calls per month from journalists seeking information on agriculture related issues. Numerous other enquiries are made through electronic means such as email in addition to the telephone contact. Ms. Fitzpatrick emphasised the point that the evidence based and expert knowledge the NFU have on all agriculture industries is substantial, and that the media recognise this. Time poor journalists and media organisations much prefer a “one stop shop” to get good information and this is one of the reasons the media view the NFU as a trusted source for information. Interestingly, whilst the NFU is indeed a lobby organisation, their information is viewed by those in the media as being balanced and credible (Fitzpatrick, G., pers. comm., 2014).

When considering their approach to campaigns on particular issues which arise from time to time, the campaigns team undertake a great deal of work to determine the best method to “sell” their message. This is not limited to the type of media used (e.g. video, television, social media) but importantly, the way the message is constructed. A powerful example of this was during the tuberculosis problem faced by British farmers in 2014. The NFU team created a video showing a farmer’s cattle being shot and the emotional toll this took on him to try and explain the need for badgers (which carry the disease) to be culled. This video was one of their most successful campaigns with a significant audience and positive feedback, mainly due to it ‘humanising’ the problem rather than presenting dry scientific facts (Fitzpatrick, G., pers. Comm., 2014).



Figure 6: British farmer David Barton, who featured in the NFU tuberculosis social media video in 2014

Conclusion

"The World is run by people who show up"

Darrell Sweet, Chairman, California Rangeland Trust

The statistics are pretty clear. Australian agriculture's connection with an increasingly middle-class and urbanised society is weakening, and this population is influencing policy makers. Time will not change this and the industry needs to act quickly to address this growing divide.

Interest groups are bombarding the general population with "information" related to the evils of factory farming, opinions on GM, environmental issues and numerous other emotive topics. In essence they are filling the void and the industry is not uniting to balance the opinions being presented.

Importantly, in recent years' communities are asking more questions about where and how their food and fibre is produced. In the absence of good information, the risks to the industry are significant. However, this desire for information and understanding presents a fantastic opportunity to "inform the masses" – it is important to find a way make it happen.

It is this part of the equation that presents the most difficulty. How exactly does the industry "inform the masses" and who should do it? This is a task too big for any one farmer, and perhaps even for the somewhat divided and disjointed representative organisations. Should it even be the job of the lobby groups?

Recent reports by a host of important and very credible organisations have highlighted the aforementioned divide and the potential problems this is creating for the industry. Suggestions have been made about "branding" Australian agriculture, yet still very little appears to be happening.

The industry needs a comprehensive and coordinated approach to attacking this problem which needs also to be linked to, but independent of, the lobby organisations. Perhaps in the way Germany's FNL is autonomous of, but still very connected with, that country's lobby organisations.

The first and most important role for the industry is to significantly improve its links with education. It is critical that children across Australia are given a clear and balanced understanding of food and fibre production, and the many opportunities which exist (or don't yet exist) in this exciting industry.

It is important to note that the industry must transcend the boundaries of states, politics and industry sectors in working to address the issues faced. To do this is difficult. There are numerous industry bodies, lobby organisations, marketing entities and other groups in Australia and bringing them together will be a challenge.

Coordinating an approach and tackling education of children and the broader community to improve the understanding of agriculture will, in the longer-term, translate into better policy outcomes. A more informed and understanding community exerts direct influence on policy makers – this is key.

The challenge of financial resources for such a program cannot be understated. In an industry where memberships to a plethora of organisations divides the “cash tin”, the industry must consider how to extract value for dollars. The propensity to measure “success” or otherwise in economic terms makes it very difficult to quantify the benefits of education programs or information programs of any kind.

The recommendations set out in this report should be viewed as a starting point for developing and implementing a program to educate and inform communities of the importance of agriculture, not just to Australia, but to its people.

Recommendations

1.1 Industry wide forum

It will be incredibly important to bring together a wide cross-section of representatives from the food and fibre industries. This should include, but not be limited to, farm lobby groups, large agribusiness companies, financial service providers, crop protection companies, representatives from the grains, meat, wool, fishing, horticulture, viticulture and other bodies. Bringing together such a large cross section of the agriculture community will not be without significant challenges, however it is vital that all of industry is engaged in the process. Further, the Nuffield organisation with its broad reach and significant respect could be an ideal facilitator for such a forum. It should be noted, however, that this has not been discussed with the Nuffield organisation.

1.2 Identify funding opportunities/foundation partners

One of the most important outcomes of a forum should be to identify those groups with the financial capacity to resource any new entity. A small working group should be established from the initial meeting to investigate various organisational structures and key priorities. Perhaps the structure of German group FNL may well be a good model to work from in this regard. It will be important to keep the structure relatively simple and “lean” to allow the organisation to work effectively.

1.3 Establish a working group

Following the forum of industry representatives and formation of a working group, this group should be charged with establishing an education committee to develop resources similar to that of the California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom. Improving the connection between young people and agriculture should be a key priority as it will bring lasting effects for the industry. Education should not be limited to school children though and identifying mechanisms to inform consumers and the broader population will also be a high priority.

1.4 Become the trusted source of information

As the British NFU and the German FNL have worked hard to become the “one stop shop” for trusted information on agriculture, this must be fostered in Australia. A divided agricultural industry makes it harder for those seeking to understand what is achieved in agriculture. It also makes it easier for those with the ability to affect policy change to play our representing entities off against each other.. An organisation that could be the central point of contact, not just for journalists but for lobby groups and others, would be a great step towards improving the understanding amongst the general population.

1.5 Relentlessly positive

Any new organisation, and existing ones, should live by the mantra of the British NFU communications team. It is vital that the positive benefits of a strong food and fibre sector are sold to the community, moving away from an old, low-technology image of the industry. Agriculture is exciting and prosperous with a great future, provided the industry maintains social license and can attract people to be involved.

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Plain English Compendium Summary

Project Title: Relentlessly Positive

Nuffield Australia Project No.: 1401

Scholar: Colin de Grussa

Phone: 0427 984 611

Email: colin.degrussa@gmail.com

Objectives

- Quantify statistics in relation to Agriculture in Australia.
- Examine some of the consumer influence groups.
- Provide an overview of recent surveys on the understanding of agriculture in schools and other educational institutions.
- Examine the “consumer”.
- Provide a description and information from some of the entities or programs working to improve the understanding of agriculture in other nations.

Background

As an industry, agriculture has not been good at telling society what we do and why we do it, which is why our increasingly urbanised communities still have a very 'grandfather' view of agriculture as an old, low tech industry. Our challenge is to find a way to tell our story; a challenge which will require resources, cooperation and a shift in thinking. Major players in the world of agriculture must be a part of this as well as farmers themselves.

Research

Research for this report was undertaken in the latter half of 2014 and involved travel and meetings in Germany, Belgium, the U.K. and United States of America. Meetings were held with representatives of various lobby groups, industry organisations, corporations and producers.

Outcomes

There are numerous programs and organisations across the globe working to try and improve the links between the agriculture industry, producers and consumers. Three important examples have been identified in this report and recommendations made for Australian circumstances.

Implications

Agriculture in Australia must improve its links with consumers in order to ensure public policy is influenced for the benefit of the industry and consumers.

Publications

Findings of this research was presented at the 2015 Nuffield Australia National Conference, held in Albury, NSW.