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## **Agriculture in northern Australia; hype, hope or just hard work?**

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Northern Australia is a region of past spectacular agricultural failures, and of current growing agricultural success and diversity and considerable future potential. It is a vast area of land, home to more than one million Australians, and with a population growth rate almost 20% higher than the Australian average.

In an attempt to address the potential and the realities of agricultural and broader development in northern Australia, the latest edition of the *Farm Policy Journal* contains a series of articles on this region of strategic significance.

“There is no doubt that economic and agricultural development in northern Australia can bring multiple national benefits,” said Mick Keogh, Executive Director of the Australian Farm Institute.

“Increased economic activity will bring employment opportunities that are essential in achieving a sustained improvement in the welfare of Indigenous people. Economic development – especially in agriculture and mining – is also likely to be export oriented and therefore to generate broader long-term national benefits.

“Economic development will also create stronger political justification for infrastructure investment, which will in turn further stimulate development. The stumbling block to this occurring has always been political will, itself a product of southern urban indifference to issues such as food security and the significance of exports for national economic wellbeing,” said Mr Keogh.

“Perhaps the policy developments that have occurred in Western Australia (the Royalties for Regions initiative) and in Canberra with the setting up of the Office of Northern Australia might finally create sufficient momentum for a new era of northern economic development to occur.

“It seems this will not be the starry-eyed, unlimited-potential version of northern development that some have proposed, but one more tempered by past experiences, yet still alert to exciting possibilities.”

The May 2009 quarter edition of the *Farm Policy Journal* provides a thorough analysis of development concepts, challenges faced by Indigenous Australians living in the region, lessons learnt from previous agricultural development projects, and investment in research as a stimulant for development. The *Farm Policy Journal* is available online [HERE](#).

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