

## Beyond the Big Data Hype: Real Opportunities for the Digital Agriculture Revolution in Australia

By [Sarah Nolet](#)

2 June 2016 – Over 270 agribusiness professionals, academics, AgTech entrepreneurs, and farmers gathered today in Sydney at the sold-out [Digital Disruption in Agriculture Conference](#), hosted by the [Australian Farm Institute](#) (AFI).

Mick Keogh, Executive Director of AFI, opened the conference with two critical questions to guide the next two days' presentations and discussions. Will digital agriculture be the third agricultural revolution that enables the next big productivity gain? If so, what needs to happen to enable this revolution to take hold in Australia? The timing could not be more critical. As the global population rapidly increases and urbanises, climate change looms, and technology infiltrates our everyday activities, agribusiness has an opportunity to reinvent itself. Australia is a key player in the global agriculture system and can become a leader in the digital age of farming.

The morning sessions gave attendees an overview of potential ways that digital technologies will, and already are, revolutionising agricultural practices. For example, local and internet-connected analysis capabilities will let a farmer snap a picture of a struggling plant with her smartphone, upload it for analysis, and receive advice identifying the issue and suggesting specific management actions she can take to resolve it. Professor Salah Sukkarieh ([University of Sydney](#)) amazed the audience with videos of robots that show potential to reduce pesticide and fertiliser usage, improve yields, and save farmers time and money. The range of digital solutions was immense, including applications livestock, row crops, oysters, and horticulture. All of the speakers emphasised that for technologies to be useful, they must solve a real problem for farmers and demonstrate a clear value proposition.

Though digital technologies show incredible potential for agriculture in Australia, a few challenges remain. For example, Dr David Henry ([CSIRO](#)) explained that connectivity remains an issue for many rural farmers. Ros Harvey ([The Yield](#)) elaborated, highlighting the need for an industry-pull to support commercialisation of research. Others throughout the day suggested that new business models are necessary to enable both farm-level and national scale solutions. Issues of data standardisation and interoperability

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across devices and systems were also raised. Finally, farmers in the room raised concerns over data privacy and ownership. It is clear that the digital revolution in agriculture will require not just technological advances, but also organisational and business model innovations.

Meaningful discussions on these challenges and potential solutions happened throughout the day. Tim Neale ([Precision Agriculture Pty Ltd](#)) offered six 'Cs' to help increase adoption of useful technologies by farmers: *cost, convenience, compliance, capacity, complexity, and champions*. Matthew Pryor ([Observant](#)) added *collaboration* on the Twitter feed (#AFIconf), where attendees enthusiastically shared conference insights.

The conference, which is the eighth annual conference hosted by AFI and the first ever on digital disruption, was made possible by gold sponsor [Nufarm](#) and bronze sponsors: [Syngenta](#), [KPMG](#), and [Digibale](#).

*"We are really excited about the range of digital innovations that are happening. As components are getting cheaper, there's a huge opportunity to bring technologies to rural areas and industries. We want to build something that will have a real impact, maybe change the world. This conference has been great – the group is focused on key issues, yet brings expertise across a wide range of technologies and the opportunities they create."* – Marcus Majass, Digibale.

The day one program will conclude with a dinner and keynote speech by Dr David Clifford ([The Climate Corporation](#) – [acquired](#) by Monsanto for \$930M). Attendees will return tomorrow for sessions on enabling conditions such as infrastructure, governance, compliance, and software development.

The Australian Farm Institute's Digital Disruption in Agriculture conference is being held at the Stamford Plaza Sydney Airport, Sydney on Thursday 2 June and Friday 3 June, 2016.

Ends

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