

## The Changing Agricultural Workforce

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The Australian farming workforce has changed considerably over recent decades, as mechanisation and technology have been substituted for labour, a specialist farm advisory and service sector has developed, and many low skill on-farm roles have been casualised.

The changes that have occurred in agribusiness are no less significant, with the employment of unskilled labour declining in many businesses, and the roles of technical and managerial staff changing as automation and technology advance. The rapid rate of development of digital technology across the sector in recent years suggests that these changes will continue to occur into the future.

This leads to some challenging questions about the appropriateness of current industry education and training arrangements. In an era where technical information is universally and instantaneously available and transport and telecommunication services have reduced the 'tyranny of distance', what are the essential knowledge and skill requirements of the agriculture sector workforce?

The papers included in this edition of the *Farm Policy Journal* provide a range of different perspectives about the future education and skills needs of the Australian agricultural workforce.

'To argue even 10 years ago that a person intending to work in agriculture would be better to acquire computer skills rather than learning to drive a tractor or shear a sheep would have resulted in derision,' said Mick Keogh, Executive Director of the Australian Farm Institute.

'However, judging from the papers included in this edition of the *Farm Policy Journal*, this argument is now supportable, and will increasingly be the case in the future. This provides some indication of the extent of workforce change that has occurred in the sector, and there is no indication that the rate of change has slowed in recent times.'

'This provides an indication of the challenge for industry participants, policy-makers, and education and training providers in trying to ensure that the agriculture sector will be able to access the workforce it requires into the future.'

# MEDIA RELEASE

Articles included in the Autumn 2017 Journal:

- 'The Changing Agricultural Workforce', by Richard Heath, General Manager Research, Australian Farm Institute
- 'The Changing Agricultural Workforce – How Can it be Sustained and Developed?', by Dan Korff, Chair, Future Farmers Network
- 'The Technology Paradigm Driving Agricultural Workforce Change', by Jim Pratley, School of Agricultural and Wine Sciences, Charles Sturt University
- 'Agribusiness is a Cornerstone of Australia's Future Prosperity', by Tim Burrow, CEO, Agribusiness Australia
- 'New Immigrants Critical to Australian Agriculture', by Professor Jock Collins, UTS Business School, Associate Professor Branka Krivokapic-Skoko, Charles Sturt University, and Dr Devaki Monani, Australian Catholic University.

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