

MEDIA RELEASE

AGRIFOOD
SKILLS AUSTRALIA



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AGRIFOOD JOBS SUMMIT GIVES HOPE TO DISPLACED WORKERS

AgriFood Skills Australia will host a National AgriFood Jobs Summit in May to assist the \$200 billion a year AgriFood industry to deal with an expected influx of displaced workers.

AgriFood CEO Arthur Blewitt said in a televised address today (31 March) at the National Press Club that new strategies and an urgent new reform agenda would be needed for the AgriFood industry to meet the challenge of accommodating new workers.

Mr Blewitt released the AgriFood industry's Environmental Scan 2009, *Assuming the Mantle*, which calls for a series of bold reforms to the vocational education and training structure, including an overhaul of funding models for regional areas and training delivered in incremental building blocs of skills as part of a whole-of-business approach to workforce needs.

"Twelve months ago the Australian economy appeared to be invincible," Mr Blewitt said. "Just twelve months later we are seeing world leaders meeting to discuss a global financial crisis, the severity of which has not been seen in our lifetimes.

"Australian industries and enterprises are now experiencing this downturn resulting in downsizing their workforces and shedding workers, with thousands of Australians who rode high in the boom times now losing their jobs.

"This is a painful body blow to our pride, our standard of living and our way of life, and of course a tough time for many families and small companies.

"Amidst this gloom, the AgriFood industry is well placed to continue its strong performance and stalwart role in supporting Australia's economic performance and export earnings.

"However, AgriFood Skills Australia is able to provide some light in the gloom with the promise of jobs and a fresh start in the agriculture, food production and racing industries."

AgriFood industries employ some 880,000 workers but productivity has been constrained by the drought and by the loss of workers to the commodity export sector during the mining boom. The AgriFood industry feeds 60 million people world-wide and is responsible for around 20 per cent of Australia's exports. AgriFood enterprises occupy two thirds of the Australian land mass and provide 93 per cent of Australia's domestic food.

"We are seeking people who've perhaps been in short term jobs and have been displaced because of the current crisis," Mr Blewitt said. "We would like to think we can find put them in jobs where they can be trained to enhance their capability and longer term career opportunities.

"There are jobs in food and meat processing and apprenticeships for butchers and meat processors. In food processing they're looking for highly qualified food technologists, again always looking for people that have skills.

"Generally in all those areas there is a capacity to start as a job entrant.

"But importantly, a lot of the jobs in our industry aren't advertised, so people have to be out there actively seeking jobs, talking to employment agencies, to group trainers and others and also some of the bigger companies so they can get signals of where the jobs might be.

"We're encouraging our industries now to identify those jobs, to advertise if they can, and to try and facilitate that transfer. All governments both federal and state are investing a lot in trying to facilitate people moving from one place to another.

"A prompt and effective translation of people to new jobs will require urgent and streamlined action by governments and industry. They must work together to relax policy and put in place locally-based capability to match displaced workers with jobs and relevant training."

He also announced Australia's first National AgriFood Skills and Workforce Summit, *New Thinking*, to be held in Sydney in September, emphasising the focus on higher skills and career pathways. .

"This will replace our national conference this year and will explore new ways of making sure our industries have the right skills and the right skilled personnel to in place carry Australia forward for the next 12 months and beyond."

Mr Blewitt said demand for food production and processing were expanding and a rising world population and rising incomes and living standards overseas presents Australia with long-term potential windfalls.

"Asia and the Pacific region – home to over half the world's population and on the doorstep of our northern shores – contain nearly two thirds of the world's chronically hungry people."

ABOUT AGRIFOOD SKILLS AUSTRALIA

AgriFood Skills Australia works in collaboration with the AgriFood industry and governments to support the development of quality training products and services and workforce innovation. The AgriFood industry includes:

- All rural and related industries
- Food processing, including beverages, wine and pharmaceuticals
- Meat processing
- Seafood and
- Racing, the sport of kings

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