

MEDIA RELEASE

AGRIFOOD
SKILLS AUSTRALIA



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AGRIFOOD OFFERS JOBS GROWTH

AgriFood Skills Australia CEO, Arthur Blewitt, told the ABARE Outlook Conference 2009 in Canberra today (4 March) that the AgriFood industry was in 'better shape' than other industries in facing up to the effects of the global economic crisis.

The industry was still employing new workers in agriculture and food production and was building its skills capability to meet a genuine demand for workers.

"This is a very good time for people looking for a change of lifestyle to an attractive environment to seriously consider getting work in the AgriFood industry," Mr Blewitt said.

"We are still short of people in areas of agriculture and food production and opportunities are there for people who may be displaced from other industries by the downturn. AgriFood offers a career path for existing workers or for students looking for work in an industry that is less likely at this stage to be as badly affected as other industries."

"Now we believe new opportunities for jobs are available. Food production will not be cut back and we expect strong growth to continue on food prices, and world population growth continues to rise."

University of Sydney data show a shortfall of 96,000 people over the next six years in agriculture's top seven occupations: livestock farmers (will need another 34,000), farm hands (21,000), crop farmers (18,000), mixed crop/livestock farmers (14,000), general mobile plant operators (4,000), bookkeepers (3,000) and shearers (2,000).

"The effect of the downturn in the labour market has already started to mobilise much-needed labour for sectors which, until now, have been constrained by chronic labour and skills shortages," Mr Blewitt said. "During the mining boom many AgriFood enterprises lost workers; the industry suffered a downturn at a time when the economy was buoyant.

"Several industry sectors are well placed to absorb considerable numbers of displaced workers, raise productivity levels and at the same time drive much of the Government's agenda on sustainability, innovation, biosecurity and innovation."

Australia's AgriFood industry produces food for 60 million people and occupies two-thirds of the land mass. AgriFood enterprises employ up to 900,000 people.

AgriFood Skills Australia has just completed national consultations for its annual Environmental Scan, visiting all states and territories and inviting views from all areas of the industry. The Environmental Scan will be released later this month, revealing the latest national assessment of the state of the AgriFood industry.

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