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Farming industry desperately needs young people

An urgent need for young people in farming industries has prompted delegates at the NSW Farmers' Association's *2010 Annual Conference: Value of Agriculture* to seek immediate action from State and Federal Governments.

NSW Farmers' Association Rural Affairs Committee Chair Sarah Thompson says at present, there are a limited number of young people in Australia's agricultural industry resulting in a skills shortage in the farming industry.

"A specific example of this problem can be found in research recently commissioned by the Australian Council of Deans of Agriculture (ACDA) that concluded that there were probably fewer than 800 agricultural science graduates each year to meet job market demand of 2000," Mrs Thompson said.

Another report commissioned by the ACDA has concluded that there has been a 30% decline in agricultural graduate completions at Australian universities for the period 2001-2006.

"These figures show the need to make tertiary agricultural subjects such as agricultural science more accessible and affordable to students across the nation," she said.

"It also highlights the role agricultural education in high schools can play in promoting agriculture as a degree option for tertiary education which could then lead to a professional career in the agricultural industry.

"Highlighting the importance of sustainable food and fibre production through years K-12 can play a key role in promoting agriculture to young people and could encourage them into a career in the agricultural industry.

"A process by which this can be accomplished is through the integration of a Sustainable Food and Fibre Policy (SFFP) into the National Curriculum.

"A SFFP for schools across the nation would act as an important foundation to mandate compound units of study to be placed within the curriculum highlighting how food and fibre are produced, the interconnectedness of food and fibre production, rural communities, the natural environment, cities and the country as a whole."

The Association is currently developing a SFFP to be implemented at a National level for schools from K to Yr12.

"The Association has voted to pursue an increase in funding in rural high schools, TAFEs and universities for the purpose of ensuring that rural families have access to high quality education," Mrs Thompson concluded.

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