

A changing of the guard



By Olivia Suzanski -
Media Adviser

Fiona Simson has been overwhelmed by the support she has received since being elected the new President of NSW Farmers, and while the introductions and invitations continue to flood in she's determined to get started.

"I think it's an exciting time for me and the incoming team, and for the Association generally as we have a look at how we're doing things now, and how we can improve that into the future," she says.

Fiona says she decided to put her hand up for this year's election at Annual Conference because the farm lobby was faced with an opportunity to reinvent and renew some of the things it had been doing for decades.

"We have a new Chief Executive, we have a new State Government, we have a new plan about 'Growing the Best' – and a new logo."

Fiona and her husband, Ed, and his family run a 5,500 hectare property at Bundella, south west of Gunnedah, as well as a commercial cattle enterprise in Queensland. She grew up on a farm in Armidale before moving to Sydney where she worked in human relations, before meeting her husband and moving back to the country.

Having close ties to the bush throughout her life she's under no illusions that convincing members NSW Farmers is capable of doing something different – and changing – will be the key to the Association's success into the future.

"The reason that I stood now was very much to show that our members were prepared to do something different, and were prepared to support someone who was going to do that," she says.



NSW Farmers President Fiona Simson flanked by Vice President Peter Darley, Senior Vice President Sam Archer, Treasurer Peter Comensoli and Vice President Richard Chamen.

During her presidential pitch to more than 350 members who attended Annual Conference, Fiona controversially referred to the association as 'so stable it [was] in danger of getting stuck'.

She says while it wasn't what many in the crowd had been expecting, she was only feeding back to the members what she had been hearing while criss-crossing the State with the Mining Taskforce.

Members, lapsed members, and non-members alike regarded NSW Farmers, as Fiona

puts it, "very much missing in action", and can't be seen in rural and regional areas so much anymore.

It's that opinion that Fiona is determined to change over the coming year.

"One of my first priorities is to make sure we start from the grassroots. We need to get back out there into the regions, to show people what we are doing, to talk to people – but above all else we need to listen to members so we can help them and represent them on a bigger scale," he said.

One body needed to represent grain growers in Canberra

NSW Farmers is concerned grain growers are poorly represented at the national level, with members voting to consider supporting a single organisation.

More than 350 farmers who attended Annual Conference voted to urgently analyse the strengths and weaknesses of all bodies aiming to be the peak grain representative.

NSW Farmers Grains Committee Chair Mark Hoskinson says members are keen to throw their support behind one organisation.

"Grain growers haven't been represented by a single peak body since the demise of Grains Council Australia. Over the past 18 months three bodies have been vying for the title, National Grains Australia [NGA], Grain Producers Australia and Grain Growers Limited.

NSW Farmers helped establish NGA as a means of seeking national representation based on a strong voice from state farmer organisations.

However, now that we have three established models we're asking all parties to come back to the table," he said.

NSW Farmers separately, and through NGA, has been negotiating with the other two bodies to achieve a single body.

Mr Hoskinson says meetings have been held with Grain Growers Limited and West Australian Farmers Federation Grains, where he's received support for the draft proposal.

He says the proposed Australian Grains Federation would be affordable, with growers asked to renew their membership on an annual basis, without any additional levies.

Beef breeder Young Farmer of the year

Marc Greening didn't expect to take out the 2011 Young Farmer of the Year title, but it's one he's more than happy to accept.

"It's something that I'm truly honoured to be part of, the agricultural industry," Mr Greening said.

Mr Greening manages Injemira, a family operated cattle stud and commercial beef business, from two properties on the NSW south west slopes.

Injemira is a vertically intergrated business encompassing all aspects of beef production, from breeding seed-stock to backgrounding, finishing and opportunistic trading.

A commercial backgrounding operation is run on "Hillside", a 2,200 hectare property at Holbrook and "Kiloran", a 200 hectare block at Book Book, which is home to Hereford and Poll Hereford stud herds.

Each year around 110 bulls and 2,200 commercial cattle are marketed, 300 hectares of cereal crops are grown and lambs finished whenever opportunities arise.

The stud herds are the base of Injemira's business, with beef genetics being imported and exported throughout the world.

Mr Greening will use the award to build his network of business contacts; he hopes to encourage more young people to get into his line of work.

"We need to encourage people of my era to take up this profession and really go wholeheartedly into it," Mr Greening said.

Mr Greening also paid tribute to Young Farmer of the Year Finalist Alan McCormack, saying he's a worthy finalist.



Marc Greening is the 2011 Young Farmer of the Year.

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