

**WESTPAC AGRIBUSINESS:
INTERGENERATIONAL FARMING REPORT**

Regional champions and changemakers

**Agriculture's next generation:
Evolution or Revolution?**

October 2023





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Emerging leaders giving good reason for optimism

New changemakers are turning the tide

Westpac's commitment to the Agribusiness sector and rural and regional Australia goes back more than 200 years. Over this period, we have seen Agriculture in Australia constantly evolve and adapt as a vital part of the nation's economy, culture and identity.

Today is no different. Insights from our latest Westpac Champions and Changemakers report tell us that Australian Agriculture is again embarking on another period of transformative change. We are excited to see a new and increasingly diverse generation of Australians joining this dynamic industry and begin to turn the tide of an ageing workforce, just as technological advancements are changing how we farm and create new and interesting careers for our young people.

Great things will be expected of the next generation as the future demands on Agriculture will only become more intense and varied. I was fortunate to be able to spend some time with the current cohort of [AgriFutures Horizon Scholars](#) in July 2023 and was impressed

by their energy, passion, commitment and willingness to learn. I believe they are more than up to the challenges that lie ahead and look forward to following their future successes.

I would like to extend a special thank you to everyone who has contributed their insights and expertise to this report, including our long-term partner, [AgriFutures Australia](#), and their Horizon Scholars as well as the inspirational current and emerging leaders who have shared their stories and insights.

Westpac's Regional & Agribusiness team is committed to supporting Australian Agriculture and the prosperity of rural and regional Australia. I hope you enjoy reading the report and we welcome the discussion that we hope it will encourage.

Best Wishes,

Peta Ward
General Manager, Westpac
Regional & Agribusiness



Evolution or Revolution?

Agriculture's next generation.

A fresh new face of Australian Agriculture is emerging, with a growing group of young, enthusiastic and diverse changemakers choosing to pursue a career in the industry. With a wide range of new science and technology increasingly being applied to industry practices and processes, this new generation sees the great potential for Agriculture and its importance in sustaining the growing local and global population.

In this edition of Westpac's Champions & Changemakers report, we will profile some of the changes that are taking place in the industry's workforce, while exploring the views of the next generation of leaders as they are poised to shape and modernise the industry. Although it's still early days, what is already apparent is that the farms and way of farming that their parents' generation once came to know will barely look the same by the time they're done.



The Changing Face of Australian Agriculture

Young Australians at the centre of an increasingly diverse industry.

The jobs available to young people today have never been more diverse or their purpose more compelling. This, combined with sustained efforts to protect and grow our rurally focussed education and training institutions and industry-based talent development programs, has changed the industry's ability to attract and retain new talent substantially.

This should be celebrated by an industry that has invested considerable time and resources to reverse the trend of an ageing workforce.

Data from the [Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2021 Census](#) provides the most comprehensive picture of how the shape of the workforce has changed in the past 15 years.

While we have seen the total number of farms decline as result of sector consolidation, the remaining farms are continually getting larger.

The number of workers employed in Agriculture has remained relatively stable as the sector has continued to grow its output. However, the demographic

profile of the workforce has been anything but stable, as Figure 1 illustrates.

Growing ranks of 25 to 34 year-olds are ready to make their mark.

In particular, the 25 to 34-year-old age group is considered an important guide to the future capacity and capability of the industry's workforce. These are workers who are trained and educated in new and improved practices and technologies and bring a fresh perspective and the confidence to challenge the status quo.

Those in the 25 to 34-year-old age group represented 15.5% of total male and female Agriculture workers in 2021, up from 14.0% and 11.1% respectively in 2006. In the 25 to 29-year-old age bracket alone there are 30% more workers than there were back in 2006 (Figure 2). It is vital that the industry builds on this momentum and not only continues to attract young talent but also work to retain it.

The direct effects of a lack of young workers entering the industry in previous years can be seen in the trajectory of

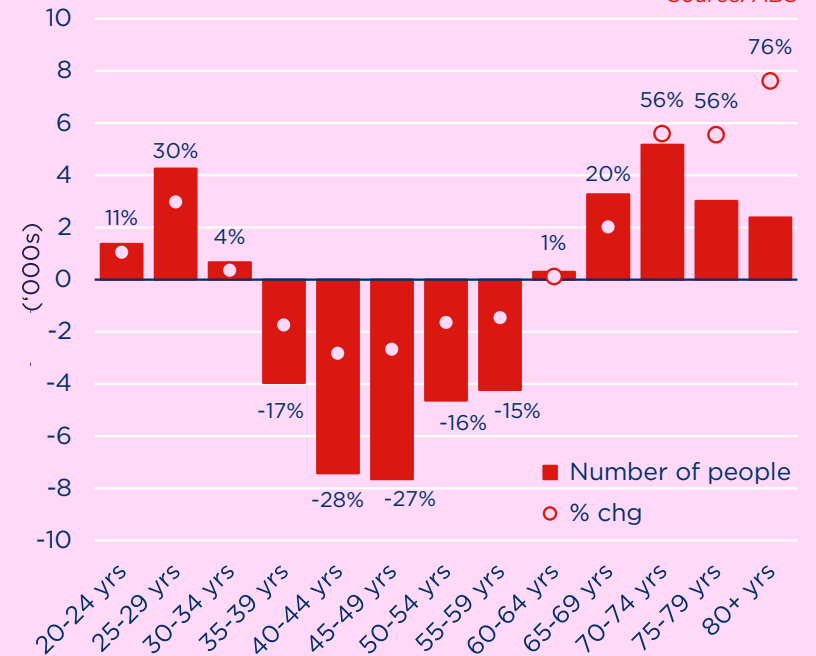
YOUNG AUSSIE FARMERS MAKING GREAT STRIDES



Australian Agriculture Workforce

2021 versus 2006 Change by Age Group

Figure 1
Source: ABS



25 to 34-year-old share of Agriculture Employment

2021 versus 2006 Change by Gender

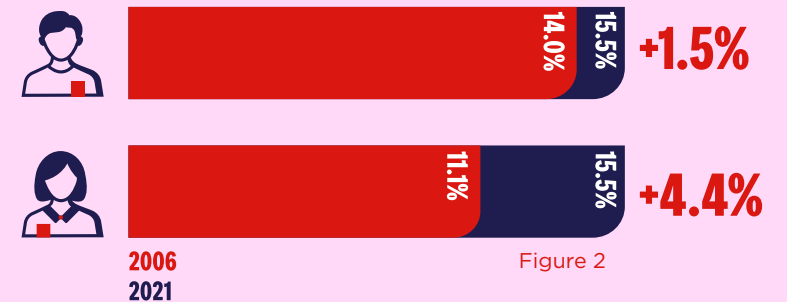


Figure 2

employment in older age demographics. Today, we see far fewer workers aged 35 to 59 years old than we did in 2006 and the peak or ‘hump’ in the age profile of the industry’s workforce is shifting out across the 45 to 64 years-old age group.

Young women as a driving force

The jump in young female workers aged 25 to 34 years-old is most remarkable, with a 42.4% increase of female workers in this age bracket relative to 15 years ago. This suggests that the industry’s efforts to embrace greater diversity and inclusion are starting to pay off, supported by the broader range of roles available in the sector.

What is also evident is that women in this age group are exceptionally well-qualified. While they represent only a third of people of this age working in Agriculture, they make up nearly half of the total bachelor-qualified workers in this age group (Figure 3). This statistic has climbed in the past 15 years, as has the number of total women in the industry with Certificate III and IV qualifications. It is evident that these women are making a significant contribution to the sector and are ready to take on further responsibilities.

Women have always been central to Agriculture’s success, but often as its unsung heroes. Traditionally they have

completed integral clerical and administrative roles on the farm. In 2021 however, the ABS Census revealed that today there are roughly three times as many young women aged 20 to 39-years-old performing managerial roles and more again in various forms of technical, trade, machinery and labourer related roles. While there may be fewer farms to work on, young women are finding opportunities in a broad array of professional roles on and off the farm including research and extension, agronomy, sustainability, sales, marketing and finance.

The diversity of skills, values, interests and ideas that young women are bringing to these workplaces is invaluable. However, more can still be done for the industry to fully realise this potential. Subsectors of Agriculture are at different stages of this journey with more labour-intensive segments, such as horticulture, dairying and feedlotting, typically having wider gender imbalances. It is evident that there is work to be done to attract and retain female workers in these specialised subsectors.

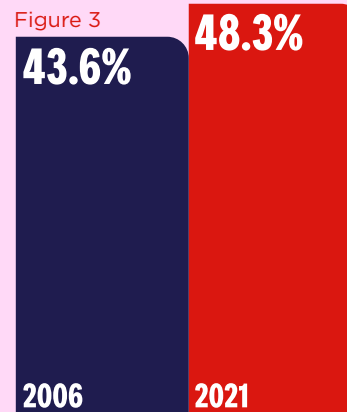
A new age of cultural diversity

While gender equality is one benefit of greater diversity in the workplace, there is endless opportunity to identify more advantages. Just as pre- and post-war

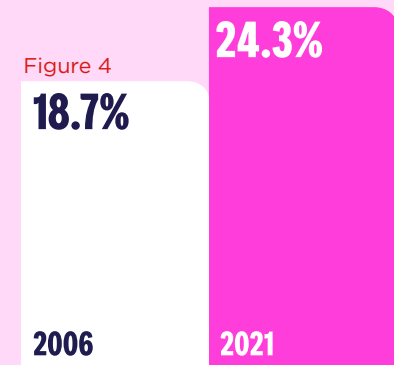
European migration transformed the industry, immigration continues to add to the rich cultural tapestry of the Agriculture sector.

The cultural profile of the sector has shifted considerably since 2006, with the share of younger workers with one or both of their parents having been born overseas significantly higher in 2021 (Figure 5). The mix of cultural backgrounds is also more diverse. While less than 20% of 60 to 69 year-olds with one or both of their parents born overseas are from non-European backgrounds, over half of those in the corresponding 20 to 39 age group claim this to be the case.

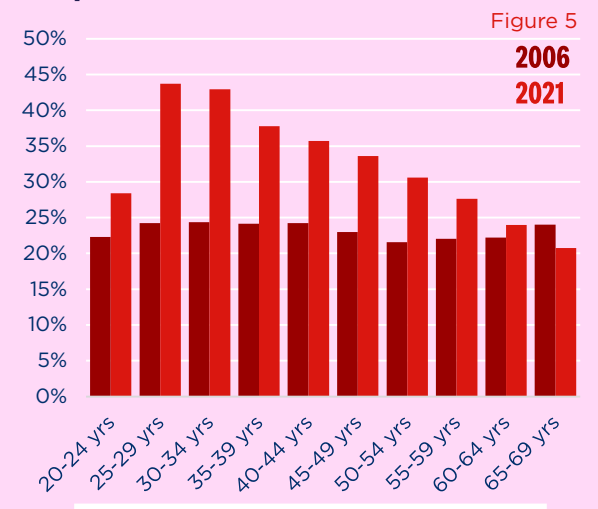
Female share of all 25 to 34-year-old bachelor degree qualified workers



25 to 34-year-old share of all bachelor degree qualified female workers



Agriculture workers with one or both parents born overseas



An Impressive new crop of emerging leaders

Rebekah Ash, PhD Candidate at Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture.

For Rebekah Ash, a passion for environment, food security and international development has seen her forge a career in Agriculture, a sector where she sees “so much opportunity” in the innovation, tech and sustainability space. And importantly, for emerging female leaders such as herself.

While looking at different degrees, Rebekah stumbled across an Agricultural course that sought to tackle the ultimate challenge; how are we going to feed our growing population sustainably and nutritionally?

“As soon as I read that, it just aligned with exactly something I could see myself working in and ticking other boxes in terms of not just being an office job, but being able to get outdoors, get hands-on, but still be innovative.”

For Rebekah, her “formative experiences were in the country”, having grown up in north Queensland before moving to Brisbane for schooling. She now works directly with landholders on greenhouse gas emissions mitigation and carbon sequestration initiatives, while also completing her PhD on socially and

economically responsible trajectories for farms to target net-zero emissions.

And this, she says, has seen her set her sights on being a “voice between policy makers and landholders” while critically keeping landholders front-of-mind.

“It’s all about the people on the ground. They have the keys to success. Change will happen with them, so we need to maintain bipartisan support towards those goals.”

Rebekah Ash, PhD candidate, Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture.

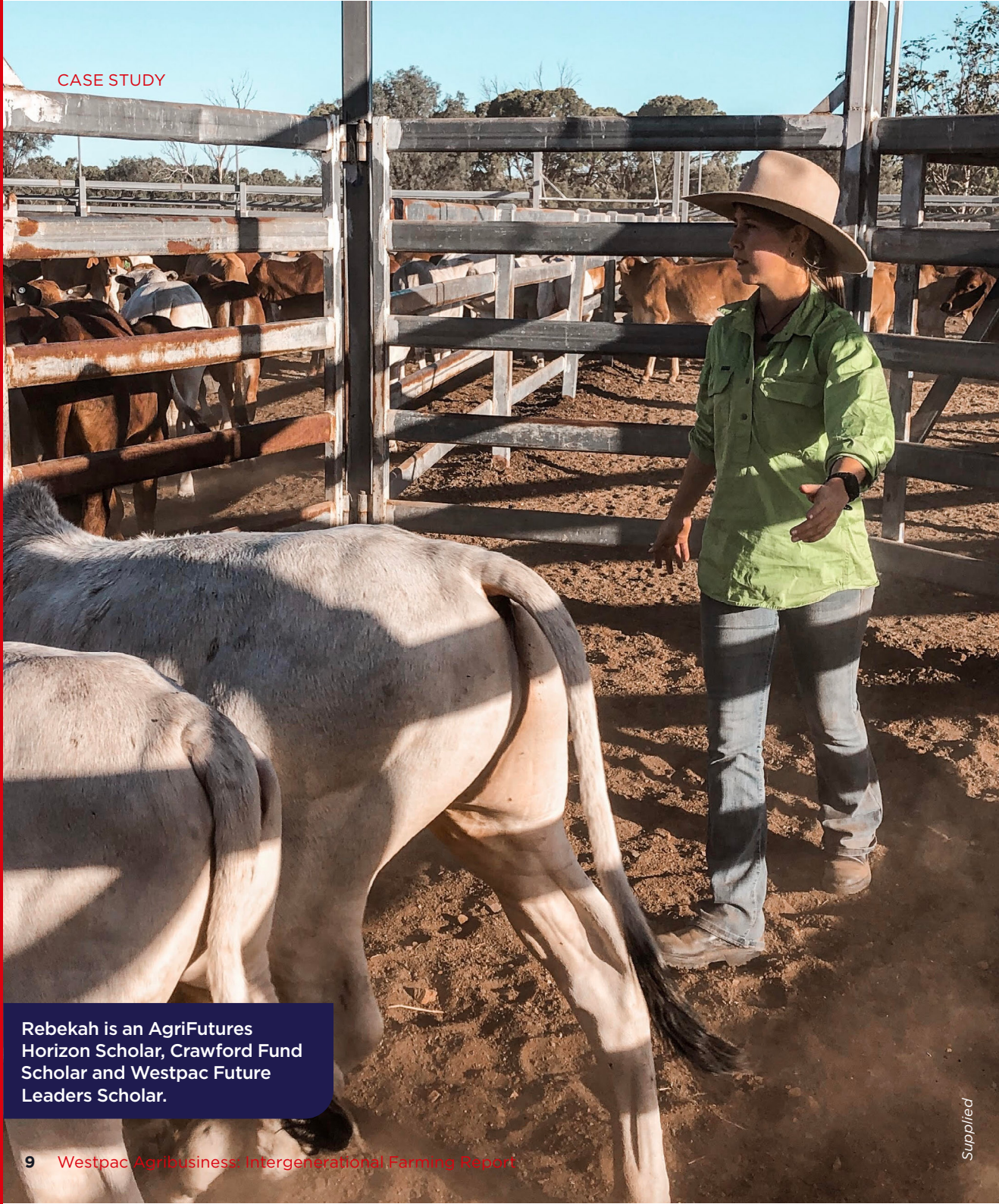
Rebekah sees a bright future for Agriculture and its role in reducing emissions, but stresses “storytelling and elevating community champions” will play an important role in encouraging others to enter the sector and in enhancing diversity and inclusion.

“Agriculture has such an incredible culture to it,” that she describes as refreshingly authentic. ▶



Rebekah Ash is completing her PhD at Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture.

CASE STUDY



Rebekah is an AgriFutures Horizon Scholar, Crawford Fund Scholar and Westpac Future Leaders Scholar.

“But let’s share it in a way that we can make people that don’t come from that background also feel comfortable and included. I think it is so important to gain different perspectives that will actually enhance our industry.” Noting that she herself has experienced various forms of prejudice as a woman in Agriculture which, even if unintended, isn’t acceptable.

This needs to happen on all levels, she says. “Making sure that kids coming through schools and others in the wider community understand it’s not just for people who have grown up on farm is really important”. And when recruiting for jobs in the sector, in terms of “being actively inclusive and understanding our natural bias”.

“I think all this comes back to storytelling, as well. On how we talk about our industry and how we share our industry because there are so many champions out there. Whether they’re championing the fact you don’t have to be from a farm, or they’re championing women, or they’re championing sustainability. There are so many people doing amazing things.

“And as an industry we need to grab a hold of those people, and those stories and really elevate them.”

Supplied

AgriFutures Horizon Scholars

The views of Agriculture’s Emerging Leaders.

The sustained investment by industry and government to address the trend of an ageing workforce in Agriculture has been critical to preparing the ground for its rejuvenation. Agriculture-related degrees, programs and skills-based training courses provide an essential avenue to engage with and set young people up for a long and successful career in the industry. There is now a broad range of customised programs available to enthusiastic and talented individuals to elevate their path to becoming an integral part of Agriculture’s future leaders.

Since its inception in 2010, the [AgriFutures Horizon Scholarship program](#) has grown to become one of the most exciting and highly regarded programs, with efforts being made to encourage and nurture the best and brightest in the industry. With almost 200 past and present alumni in 2023, Belinda Allitt – General Manager of Workforce, Communications and Adoption at AgriFutures, credits the program’s success to the industry sponsors who support the final years of the scholars’ tertiary degrees.

With the assistance of Agrifutures, Westpac recently surveyed a focus group of more than 30 members from the Horizon Scholarship program to gain an understanding of what they see as the key sector issues and opportunities. The cohort of 20 to 35 year olds provided their views on what can be done to attract more young people into the Agriculture industry and position them for future success. In an economy with an unemployment rate below five percent and the Agricultural industry forecast to [grow beyond \\$100 billion in farm gate production by 2030](#), the war for talent is one that Agriculture must fight and win.

Both sides of the sustainability coin

The question of Agriculture’s sustainability, or Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) credentials, can be posed as either a threat or an opportunity for Agriculture. AgriFuture’s emerging leaders acknowledge both sides of this debate, however holistically the concept of ‘shared value’, where doing what is good for society can often in turn create value and opportunity, is unanimously accepted. ▶

ARISING OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE NEXT GEN



“Not only through funding, but also through invaluable work placement and industry knowledge. Together, the industry is embracing these young people and value adding to their journeys”

Belinda Allitt, General Manager of Workforce, Communications & Adoption at AgriFutures

Biggest opportunities and challenges agriculture faces to grow and prosper Figure 6

Science & Technology Opportunities

“Data capture & analytics”

“Next gen. biology & chemistry”

“Automation”

“Artificial intelligence”

“Info systems development / integration”

Environmental, Social & Governance Challenges

“Changing community / consumer expectations”

“Climate change / extreme weather”

“Acquisition & retention of talent”

“Natural resource availability / degradation”

“Impact of sector consolidation on regional communities”

More than half of respondents listed ESG issues as the number one challenge that the Agriculture sector will face over the course of their careers. A significant number also listed ESG issues as the biggest opportunity. This wary yet optimistic perspective is vital as their generation will lead the industry's response to debates surrounding ESG and ultimately determine the side on which the coin will fall.

Also front of mind for this group are challenges such as the sector's ability to adapt to climate change and extreme weather events while maintaining production, rapidly changing communities and their expectations of Agriculture and natural resource degradation.

Major opportunities for the sector include reinforcing ESG credentials and social licence through the uptake of practices such as regenerative Agriculture, participating in the carbon and biodiversity economy and raising animal welfare standards.

The makings of a revolution

Many Horizon Scholars are attracted to the buzz of new science and technologies in the industry - as harnessing the full potential of these enablers will be the industry's key to successfully respond to the identified

challenges. Nearly half of respondents consider various aspects of science and technology as the greatest opportunity the sector will face over the course of their careers. Front of mind are technologies and processes such as artificial intelligence, automation, data analytics, precision Agriculture, (sustainable) intensification and genetics.

The vast majority of survey respondents believe that their generation will undoubtedly approach farming differently to generations before them. They anticipate being more open to technological advancements and the potential of new practices, technologies and data-driven farming methods. Respondents also predict behavioural changes due to climate and environmental pressures. These include their need to adapt to a changing climate, manage their carbon footprint and a greater felt responsibility to the environment (Figure 7).

Technological advancements alone will not solve the pressing challenges of industry and society. It is only when it is combined with the demographic change currently being experienced in Agriculture, together with the institutions and programs to attract and develop the talent of tomorrow, that science and technology can enable Agriculture to grow in ever more productive and sustainable ways.

SCIENCE, TECH AND ESG IMPACTING THE FUTURE OF FARMING



How the next generation thinks they will approach farming differently to past generations

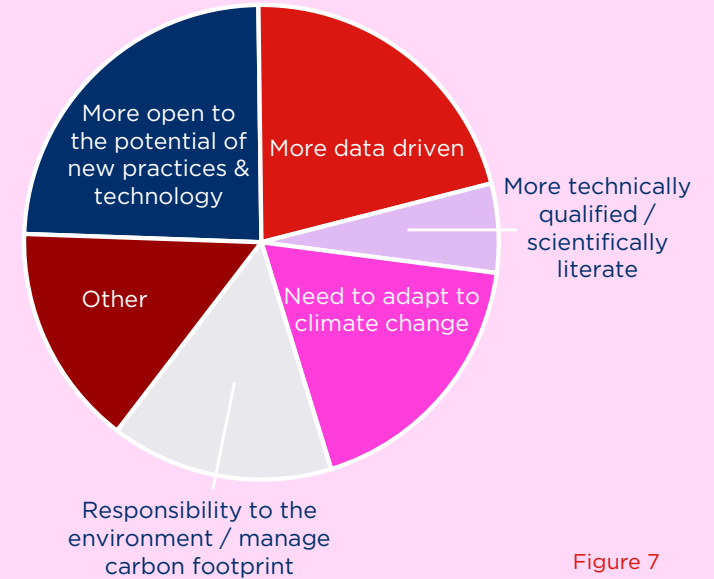


Figure 7

Productivity and sustainability 'sweet spot'

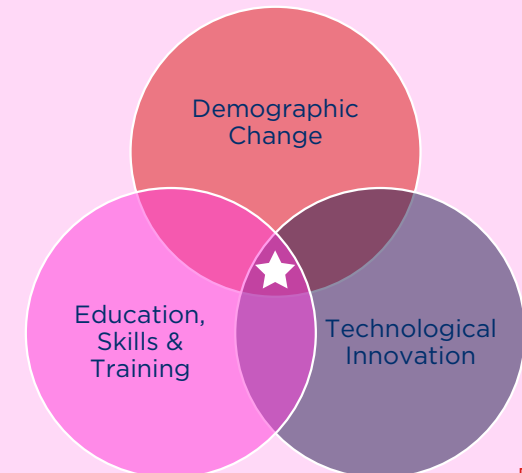


Figure 8

We believe that finding this productivity and sustainability ‘sweet spot’ as illustrated in Figure 8, has the potential to revolutionise Australian Agriculture as we know it, provided that the sector can continue to make the necessary investments in each of these critical areas.

The growing appeal of Ag work

Survey respondents suggested that integrating Agricultural-related subjects into the school curriculum would create more interest surrounding a career in Agriculture. Consistent with Rebekah Ash’s comments and AgriFutures Australia’s research ([‘Listen Up! Young people’s perspective on the future of rural industries’ report](#)), storytelling has a powerful role to play here in promoting the innovative, diverse and rewarding work that the Agriculture sector has to offer young people.

Many Horizon Scholars are implementing these solutions already as they intend to further their Agriculture careers as researchers, agronomists, professionals and agents, and in government or industry agencies. Many intend to continue their work in farming businesses. Whether as part of a multi-generational family farming enterprise or with a corporate Agribusiness, Horizon Scholars observe that technology is not only influencing how decisions are being made but is also removing the monotony

of some day-to-day tasks.

Promoting a diverse and inclusive workplace remains a priority. When asked whether women and people of diverse backgrounds in Agriculture face equal opportunity to succeed in their work, 67% of young men think there is still more than can be done. Comparably, over 75% of young women share this view, with a proportionate amount of women believing that ‘much more’ can be done (Figure 9).

Life in the bush is no longer a world away

Showcasing the benefits of rural and regional Australia remains a challenge for Agriculture, especially to young adults. Our emerging leaders were split on the question of the appeal to young adults (20-35 years-old) of living and working in rural and regional Australia. Over half of respondents rate the appeal as strong, while the remainder of the cohort see it as being limited for people of their age.

Around three-quarters of respondents listed the sense of community and belonging in their top-three advantages of life in the country. This was followed by the proximity to the natural environment, the cost of living, and work-life balance. All compelling reasons it must be said, but potentially more so for adults at a later age and stage of life.

There are good reasons to be optimistic on this front, however. In many cases Australia’s larger regional centres are experiencing steady growth in industry, employment and social amenities where the necessary investment in public planning, infrastructure and housing has been made. And while life on the land can still be isolating in remote areas, improved connectivity has helped to bridge this gap, as shown by initiatives such as [Motherland Australia](#) pioneered by 2022 [AgriFutures Rural Women’s Award](#) National Winner, Stephanie Trethewey.

Do women and people of diverse backgrounds face equal opportunity to succeed in agriculture?

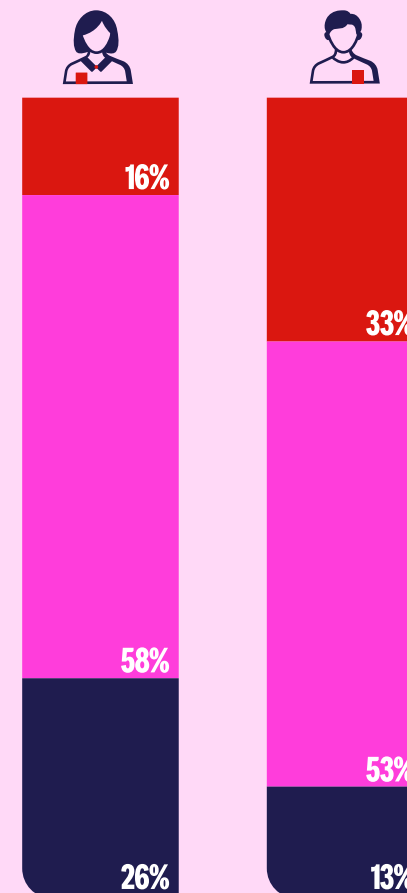


Figure 9
Yes, it's very open and inclusive
Mostly, but more could be done
No, much more needs to be done

N.B. Rounded to the nearest whole number

Shining a light for the next generation

Tess Herbert, co-owner of Gundamain Pastoral and 2023 Farmer of the Year.

Tess Herbert is a trailblazer in the Agricultural industry, not only as a prominent voice in the beef sector through her numerous board and industry roles, but as an innovative farmer which saw her and husband, Andrew named [2023 Australian Farmers of the Year](#).

Her twenty-year career, which has seen her rise to the helm of some of the industry's peak bodies, including the Australian Lot Feeders' Association (ALFA), Australian Beef Sustainability Framework and now Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA), has been built on hard work, thinking outside the square and sticking to her core values.

"It's thinking differently, and at times, doing what is brave," Tess explains.

Initially "tapped on the shoulder" to step up into her first board role at ALFA, where her grassroots understanding of the industry and its systems came to the fore, Tess then invested in her leadership and negotiation skills through the Australian Rural Leadership Program.

"I sat on that board for nine years and was

the chair for three. But I stepped through the process and knew if I wanted to be Chair, I needed to prepare myself."

This dedication and self-investment, including recently completing a Masters in Ag Business, together with her ethos to "do the work", has led to Tess being held in high regard and in high demand. While the couple's farming business, Gundamain Pastoral Co has also transitioned from a small mixed farm to a highly progressive and sustainable 6000-head cattle feedlot operation, with an extensive sheep and cropping arm.

Tess says her passion for broader industry work stems from "not chucking rocks from the outside" but being willing to offer a "perspective which might be different, but one that needs to be heard too".

But she also advises future leaders to be prepared to do the work and be challenged. "If you put your hand up, it's not going to be easy. It's not going to be rainbows and butterflies, and not everyone will agree with you. People will challenge you. People will disagree with you." ▶



Tess and Andrew Herbert have been named 2023 Australian Farmers of the Year.

“I’ve been at times that lone voice in the room, and you do need to get comfortable with that. Do a check in with your values and if that still resonates, then stick to your guns a little bit. It doesn’t mean you will always win.”

With the industry “progressing in leaps

and bounds” over the course of her career, and women now able to avail themselves of many opportunities afforded through scholarships, leadership programs, mentoring and women-led organisations, Tess stresses that while she was often the “only woman in the room”, she was well supported when

starting out in the industry. But urges the sector to “speak to the diversity of ag”.

“When you witness that lack of diversity, my mind always goes ‘hang on,’ could that be better? Are there voices not being heard somewhere because of a lack of diversity in that board, or that committee or that panel or that conference?”

“It is good to have that different voice challenging what’s being said or what’s accepted as the norm. Because they tend to have a different viewpoint than some of the people that have been around for a long time and that can get entrenched in a way of thinking.

And Tess says the “emerging inclusivity of Australian Agriculture” is a sign of a sustainable future for those who choose to work in the industry.

There is not only progression and changes afoot in the sector, she says, but also on her own farm with the family in the throes of starting succession planning, a process she says “wasn’t an easy journey” when they went through it.

With the key to “talk about it early and often” when engaging with each member of the next generation, Tess says that they have “made it quite clear that any one of them that was interested could come back and we would make that

happen somehow.”

“We didn’t pressure them to do one thing or another. We didn’t say you must go out and get a degree or a trade or whatever. If they wanted to come back straight away, that was fine. But they have all made the decision to work and study independently and our eldest has now come back to work with us.”

Tess says with the family gearing up to celebrate 150-years of Herbert custodianship on their property, it is a long and proud family legacy.

“They are the sixth generation on our farm so we would like that to continue, and they know that, so there’s a little bit of pressure. But it’s open to any of them if they would like.”

Tess Herbert, co-owner of Gundamain Pastoral



Tess and Andrew with their daughter, Caitlin Herbert, in Eugowra, Central West NSW.

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Handing over the reins

Embracing untraditional succession management in the industry.

The way businesses and industry groups manage succession is critical to future growth and sustainability.

This issue has become especially critical for Agriculture given the relative lack of young people entering the industry until recently, and family succession not always being approached in the most open and inclusive manner.

This is perhaps in part owing to tradition, family dynamics, or even a lack of sufficient scale or profitability in their business.

One-third of AgriFuture's Horizon survey respondents said they came from a family that currently operates a farming business, with the survey providing a first-hand perspective of younger family members who often get to see much, but speak little, of the topic.

A clear majority stated that they are interested in playing an active role in managing the business in the future. A smaller number were happy to have a more passive role while still retaining a direct interest.

Male respondents were exclusively interested in the former response, with female respondents noting they are more open to pursuing a career outside of the family business in other capacities.

Almost all Horizon Scholars believe that the roles and responsibilities within their family farming business are being shared fairly and equitably. However, transparency of planning processes and participation in decision making is mixed.

While over half of the cohort confirmed that succession had been openly discussed and planned for in their family business, over a third of respondents felt as though succession would or had not been dealt with fairly and equitably.

This suggests that many Australian family farming businesses can benefit from exploring more transparent and cooperative ways of navigating ownership succession.



An open and innovative approach to succession

The Houghton and Bell families, Bidgee Cropping, Gogeldrie NSW.

The formation of a business partnership between Rob and Jenny Houghton and their neighbours, Andrew and Jenna Bell has not only provided a succession pathway for both parties but is a model they see facilitating opportunities for future generations and possibly others in the community.

Formed 18 months ago, the Bidgee Cropping partnership sees the two Leeton-based families run their land together, sharing water and machinery, to run an extensive irrigated cropping operation. But it is the combination of the Houghton's knowledge and experience, together with the Bell's injection of youth and innovation, that has seen the partnership thrive.

“It is the most exciting project I have been involved in, in my 35 years of farming.”

Rob Houghton, Gogeldrie Group, NSW,

“And my observation over the last 18 months of being involved with this group is the injection of youth has added so much vitality to our operation – how we

go about things, the risks we take – but also how we execute and discuss our plans.”

Rob says the formation of the partnership model was a very deliberate decision to create an entry point for talented young farmers to enter Agriculture – a process that is becoming harder with appreciating land values and interest rates – but is essential for the future vitality of communities and the industry more broadly.

With their own children off pursuing other careers and at this stage not interested in coming back to farming, Rob says they faced one of two trajectories.

“We could either hang around and hold onto the farm and let it deteriorate to the point where it is not all that productive, but we are living off the equity” or adopt this innovative model creating “continued asset growth, continued system improvement and the injection of new technologies into the business.”

But it is the flow-on effects to community, the local town and businesses, and the



Rob and Jenny Houghton & Andrew and Jenna Bell of Bidgee Cropping with their Westpac Senior Relationship Manager, Sara Pixley

Credit: Mads Porter Photography

CASE STUDY

industry more broadly that Rob is most passionate about.

“This continuum of progress has a lasting effect on a community, town and industry, where you have young people who have children going to school and you have young parents actively involved in the community – it’s what we have to strive for.”

With the partnership grounded in trust, mutual respect, shared goals and values, both parties say it has flourished with clear and open lines of communication.

“Who you end up in partnership with is critical,” Jenny says. “We are all flexible and respectful, that’s very important.”

“We both share very similar family values,” Jenna agrees. “And I think that carries through with the flexibility we have with Rob and Jenny. They are very deserving, and we encourage them to go away as much as possible and spend time with family.”

For Rob and Jenny, that flexibility alone has made it worthwhile.

“Already now, the business doesn’t rely on me being here all the time,” Rob says. “So that’s a really big box to tick for us. It’s hard to put a dollar figure on that but it is very valuable from a lifestyle perspective.”

Lacking the machinery to run their own property to its full capacity, Andrew says the partnership has allowed them to scale up their business, with the partnership acquiring more land in its own right.

Andrew says while their children are still young and it is not known if they will want to be involved in the future, the partnership provides opportunities for all parties.

“We are creating a platform, whether it’s the next generation, or whether its other young families in the community, It’s a platform that allows them an opportunity in, and also the next generation out. Hopefully it’s something more people can adopt in the future.”

Rob concurs. “If an older couple think they have something to offer and don’t really want to exit Agriculture and live in town, it’s a great option. But also for the younger generation.” he says.

“We don’t want to rob anyone the opportunity of being involved in an Agricultural pursuit if they have the passion, skills and drive to succeed.

“If in 20 years’ time, I could look at this model and it has facilitated a perpetual entry method for young people, I am going to be way more proud of that than owning a farm that I can’t even farm.”



Rob and Andrew are spearheading untraditional methods of succession planning, Gogeldrie, NSW.

An industry built on community

Leadership succession outside of family farming businesses is vital to the sector's future sustainability and success. Conversations with highly respected and experienced industry leaders highlights a void that needs filling.

It is not unusual for older generations to serve in leadership positions well beyond retirement years due to a lack of industry participants who are free and willing to assume leadership positions while in their prime.

A new generation of talented and enthusiastic Agricultural professionals is now emerging and starting to engage and direct the future of their industries and communities. Those surveyed showed a high level of participation in a wide range of volunteer roles from an early stage. These are mostly held through local sporting teams or recreation clubs, community services such as local fire services, and industry groups and associations.

Community volunteer work is not easily converted into immediate leadership roles. Supporting young people to establish capability to contribute at this level is essential for their success, as are programs and initiatives such as coaching, mentoring and the creation of shadow boards and committees.

Over two-thirds of the surveyed group identified the need for affirmative action by those in leadership positions. Many called out the need for more events that help them to expand their networks and relationships.

“Shoulder-taps” from current leaders and a willingness to embrace greater diversity and inclusion were also seen as effective ways to encourage younger farmers to accept industry and community leadership opportunities. While traditionally this may seem premature, the time to engage is now to navigate and continue to shape a rapidly evolving industry.

ENCOURAGING LEADERSHIP IN TIGHT-KNIT COMMUNITIES



Top 5 things that could be done to encourage more aspiring 20 to 35-year-olds into leadership roles

MOST IMPORTANT

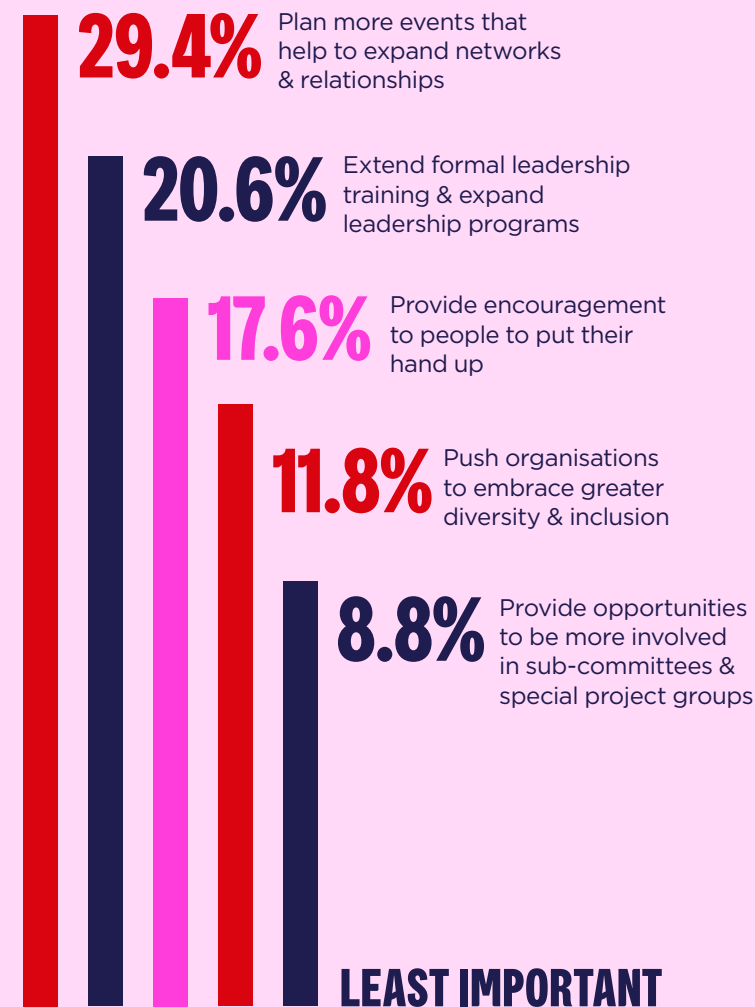


Figure 10

* 11% of respondents answered 'other'

Putting science and technology into practice

New technologies boom as human contact remains vital.

Perhaps not since the introduction of mechanisation has the Agriculture industry known such a transformative period in how it produces food and fibre for the world.

While technological innovation has long been an integral part of Australian Agriculture, the breadth and rate of innovation and adoption has risen in recent years to help farmers streamline tasks and input use, make more timely and effective decisions, refine product attributes, and better adapt to the climate around them.

Technology transforming life on farm

Ask farmers and they will tell you the magnitude of how much some innovations have changed the way they work and live. In our prior conversation, Bidgee Cropping partner Rob Houghton described how “irrigation automation has been the single most beneficial piece of technology in changing the way we do business.” He credits automation for giving him more time at home, more rest, room for strategic thinking and thereby the ability to make better day-to-day decisions.

Finding the right technology to work with on the right problems is often the most difficult step towards turning promise into productivity for farmers. Agtech business [Goanna Ag](#) – an Australian based venture that Westpac provided seed equity funding to in 2019 – knows this journey all too well. Goanna Ag’s management emphasises the need for any technologists to spend time in the field to intimately understand the work and pain-points of intended end-users.

They note that the more successful agtech startups are started by people who have experienced the pain points in Agriculture and go looking for technical solutions. The best solutions also do well to compliment a farmer’s existing management regime and are able to quantify a return on a farmer’s investment. Goanna Ag’s founder Tom Dowling was a former agronomist and today Goanna Ag develops various in-field sensors and telemetry solutions to optimise input use on farm.

Businesses such as these show how the speed of new technological innovation and adoption has increased, as has connectivity for mobile apps, sensors

and hardware in the field. Goanna Ag states how its sensors that measure plant temperature to inform irrigation scheduling were introduced a little over two seasons ago and now as much as 60% of the cotton industry are actively using them. The growing involvement of corporate farming and younger generations are also seen to be enabling factors for technological adoption.

A lot of technological innovation is seen as being very incremental, but there are some aspects such as automation and robotics, and precision Agriculture solutions that have the potential to make a step change. And some solutions don’t just make things easier and more efficient but can help demonstrate that farmers are doing the right thing by the environment, their neighbours, employees, consumers, and society at large.

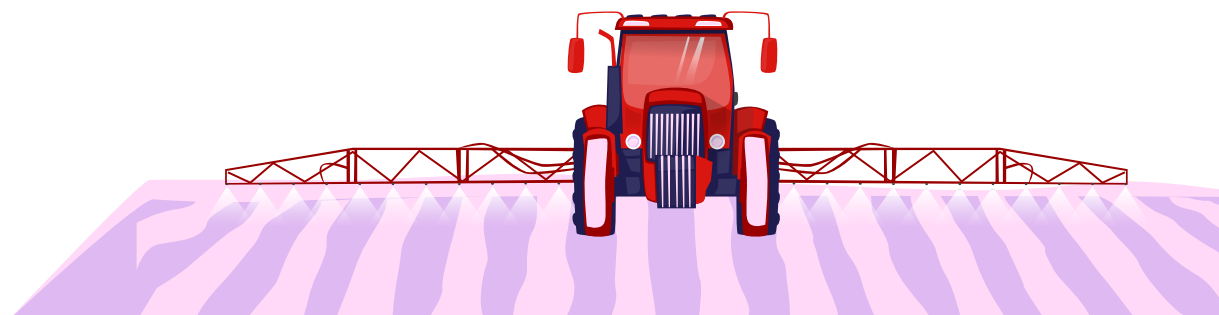
Goanna Ag’s ‘[Wand Network](#)’ of inversion towers developed in association with [GRDC](#) and [CRDC](#) is designed to help farmers optimally apply chemicals by advising when they should or should not spray based on hazardous conditions. The real win for industry is that regulators

are far less likely to remove vital access to active chemicals such as glyphosate that farmers depend upon.

Training and education provides the vital link between people and technology.

Developing a viable and effective technical solution is one challenge, but facilitating industry adoption is another critical element of success. In this respect, programs such as the [NSW Farms of the Future \(FotF\)](#), funded by the Department of Regional New South Wales and implemented by the NSW Department of Primary Industries, have provided vital funding, education and expertise to demonstrate the potential of new technology and how it can be integrated into farming businesses. The FotF program aims to demonstrate best practices in adopting Agricultural technologies into farming operations, for increased productivity and resource management.

Program Leader for Farms of the Future, Ailie Webb has observed strong and steady interest in agtech training and education over the course of the



program and how their development officers play a pivotal role in taking people on an adoption journey. “We have really wanted to remain tech agnostic, and focus on teaching people how to choose the best technology for their situation. This involves diving into pain points as they relate to each individual farm, and then exploring how to meet these challenges with the right tech solutions that we’ve identified.”

Goanna Ag emphasises the importance of having somebody who can be the ‘friend of the farmer’ and help them interpret what is of real value. Ailie Webb agrees and could see early on while designing the program that farmers often didn’t know where to look for information or who to turn to. “We knew that was a big gap in the market, people didn’t have someone to talk to about their situation, so relationship building has been critical for us.” This experience shows that coordinating training and discussion forums, and providing educational resources, where farmers can explore and share their experiences can be just as critical as any funding support.

What is clear is that more, not less, investment into technical extension services will be required from industry and government if adoption is to reach scale and fully capitalise on the public and private sector investments being made in research and development.

This would also serve to provide a valuable source of new and exciting jobs for young people in rural and regional Australia with an interest in science and technology.

Ailie Webb sees this playing out in the Farms of the Future program through the young team she has around her, including the majority of her full-time team being talented young women. She also credits some of the success of the program to their diverse skillset and ability to empathise and guide people who are navigating change and uncertainty. Ultimately this human dimension is essential to unlocking the potential of technology to transform businesses and lives.



Final Thoughts

Emerging leaders at the heart of Agriculture's future successes

In many respects Australian Agriculture has been riding high in recent years as the sector has produced record output on the return of strong seasonal conditions and buoyant commodity prices. This should serve as an impetus rather than a distraction to continue to future-proof the industry to cope with current and emerging environmental, societal and economic pressures.

The makings of a revolution are upon us. One that promises to help Agriculture adapt to a future where it must work in ever more productive and sustainable ways to feed a growing society with a more demanding climate both on the farm and in the marketplace. At the heart of this revolution is the rising interest we are observing among young people in Agriculture, validating the work and investment being done to address a steadily aging workforce.

The intersection of this trend with a new age in technological advancements in Agriculture is no coincidence. The youth of today are responding to the way in which technology is changing Agriculture and our young future leaders themselves say that now is the time to re-double

efforts to attract and nurture more changemakers like them. The sector's ability to navigate succession, capitalise on the technological advancements of tomorrow and reach the productivity and sustainability 'sweet spot' depends on it.



About the research

The Westpac Intergenerational Farming Study data has been drawn from two sources:

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census
- AgriFutures Emerging Leaders in Agriculture Survey

ABS Census

Westpac analysed and compared data from both the Australian Bureau of Statistics' 2006 and 2021 Census of Population and Housing that provides a comprehensive picture of how the shape and profile of the agriculture workforce has changed in the space of the last 15 years. This included attributes such as workers' age, gender, ethnicity, education, labour force status, income and occupation.

AgriFutures Emerging Leaders in Agriculture Survey

Westpac surveyed a cohort of 34 out of the 195 past and present participants in the AgriFutures Horizon Scholarship

program. Of these, there were 22 respondents aged 20 to 25 years-old and 12 respondents were aged 26 to 35 years old, while 15 of the respondents were male and 19 respondents were female.







Need to know more?

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If you have any questions or would like to know more about the information contained in this report, please contact:

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Access an online version of Westpac's
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