

Dungog Future of Farming Forum No.2 - Outcomes

held 4 – 6 pm on Friday 22 July 2022

Dungog Memorial RSL

The aim of the forum was to:

- Facilitate greater involvement of young people in local farming and related ventures
- Showcase local enterprises

Facilitator: Cameron Archer

Acknowledgement of Country

Words of Welcome - Cr Digby Rayward

Welcome. The future in the Shire is very important and this discussion needs to take a different path. Past has shown specific groups – we can see a whole range of options in this ag space. We are finding our feet to find better the direction we need to take. We have the DDCC group leading this forum, along with Daniel Le Blanc from Dungog Shire Council.

Council has now adopted the draft of the 2022 – 2026 Economic Development Plan. This is so important, requires community feedback - 28 days is the length of time to review and provide feedback. The region is in the midst of an important transformation. The old “dairy/beef” is no longer at the forefront, things in Ag are changing. Traditional Ag has progressed. We need to focus on the economic growth of the shire.

Dungog High School

Steven Harper is ill, however other reps here, Anne Middlebrook and Shayne Lawrence in his stead. Anne is the careers advisor; she has seen many changes in the time that she has been in this area. Shayne is at Dungog for 10 years, offering Agriculture from Year 7-12. Primary Industries is a subject offered to senior students and students are completing work placements in a vast range of agricultural industries across the state. Shayne highlighted that one the biggest issues is finding and retaining teachers. Dungog High has just recently been notified that they are losing an Agriculture teacher to pursue work in the agriculture industry. Staffing one of the biggest issues they face. Two years ago, had 10 different teachers teaching agriculture and with only 1 qualified. Thankfully timetabling has improved however the school is facing a restricted offering to students due to qualified staff shortages.

A further issue is the overwhelming paperwork that the Primary Industry teachers face. The greatest plus is the students, with many students having a genuine interest in the agriculture fields. During Year 10 the students have the opportunity for 2 weeks of work experience, with a big call for Ag placements, however the transport is one the biggest issues faced there as they do not have a licence at this age. Many parents work and have limited capacity to provide

transport. The students are generally proactive and often find their own placements. Anne noted that the agriculture facilities at the school are fantastic, and this is a strength, including the Ag related aspects of the school location.

Julie Eldridge – Youth Express

Youth Express is a not-for-profit charity that operates across the Hunter. Their motto is to support every young person in the Hunter to be the best that they can be, by using a comprehensive approach to enable every young person to see where they fit into community and work. To do this, we develop partnerships between education, business, industry, and community. Their programs include work placements identification and support, partnerships development, life and employability skill development, employment access support, Moving On to assist Year 12 school leavers to transition successfully, school and business data collection. Career development support programs as well as culturally sensitive and safe youth engagement and employment support programs to support Indigenous young people. Youth Express work with every High School cross sector in the Hunter including Dungog HS.

Youth Express facilitates work placement across the Hunter region to support young people that have included vocational education subjects as part of their HSC. We encourage School Based Apprenticeship and Traineeship uptake across industry areas.

A positive is schools are no longer going to be penalised with staffing loss when a young person's SBAT requires them to study off school site and timetable. After 30 years, working in this space, I still see these pre-perceptions of young people being displayed by the minority. They need supported employment opportunities where they can learn and understand 'What they don't know'.

A Youth Forum held in 2019 showed that 50% of the young people present believed that if they had more opportunity to interact with business and more work-based information, during their school years, that they would have been more successful in finding sustainable work in a shorter period.

QUESTIONS: *How can we address the high unemployment?* - Look at the traineeships, they need training as they feel that they cannot do the work and shy away from it, so we need to offer them training so as they are not so vulnerable.

Youth Express can assist to make the connections to the young people that can be the next employee of your Ag business.

Carmen Blundell - Mai-Wel LabourForce Solutions

Disability employment services Mai-Wel is in Dungog on Wednesdays. A focus on mental health disability, to work with young people to meet their work goals. They need to be over 14 years, and willing to work 8 hours a week. Work closely with the Dungog High School. We encourage the students to come to us so as we can support them better.

A Transition to Workforce provider – helps those that are finding difficulty in getting work. We assign them a dedicated support person to assist them now and into the future. We provide them

with courses, licenses, resumes, applications, internships, traineeships to name a few. There are a few eligibility requirements that are not onerous. We also work with Local Government to support the community.

Tocal College – Darren Bayley (Principal), James Hooke (Deputy Principal)

James spoke about Tocal. James has strong connections to the local dairy industry and is also a former student of Dungog High School. Tocal is an Ag college and is located on traditional lands of the Wonnarua People. 1822 was the first land grant, and the land was bequeathed to become a training college. 50 years since the first female students. We need to sell to our young people the importance of Ag. We need to feed the growing population. CSIRO are using figures to show that we need to grow Ag. All stats are pointing to the need to increase. We need skilled people to cope with change and growing issues. Currently about 54% of people in Ag have completed Year 12, training is critical as the requirements to have completed Cert III will be 70%.

The local community can support Tocal more and the rewards are enormous. Full time residential is the main program, and complete Cert III. Once they leave and graduate then they can work in the Ag industry. Cert IV allows them to go to a higher level and there is also a Diploma available. 94% satisfaction rate, students are being offered permanent work before they even finish at Tocal. Block training is also available at Tocal, very good incentives with traineeships including a 50% wage subsidy. We need to get to young people early – DPI schools' program – Tocal is involved in this area. Huge variety of skills are available at Tocal, such as Drone training, quad bike, welding to name a few. Tocal also produces publications. They are also often used by employers. Tocal has a very large farm 2,200 hectares including dairy, horses, sheep, poultry, bees – which is a vast range to offer both students and local industry as there is also a research component. Finally, a heritage component at Tocal = A great package.

Tocal believes in - attraction, encouragement, retaining and training. Ag undersells itself. We are inclined to tell everyone how bad things are – not in our best interests to do this, but it seems to be the Ag way. We are happy to work with schools, make our facilities available. Parents are an important part of the process, and we need to ensure that we do our “sell” to them as well as the students.

Training used to advantage that the youth are confident, so we need to harness this, example digital Ag. Support the students when they are now independents and all the issues that they face in that area. Our experience is that completed trained people more often than not, stay in the area

Wholefood Co-Op – Allan spoke on owner's behalf

Great interaction with the volunteers and the grower base is expanding every week. Enquiries are coming in all the time. Local food and “home grown” food is becoming sought after. Larger supplies are being looked at. Education side of the business to provide workshops, and as they are settling in to their new space, the number of people involved is impressive. Interaction with food is what they are all about. It is not about price; it is about an interactive shopping experience for their customers. Organic Certified is being offered.

All in all, it is going fantastically, and the Co-op group is very happy and look forward to becoming a bigger player in the food and Ag market.

Cameron Archer – Primary Industry Education Foundation Australia (PIEFA)

PIEFA is a national not for profit company supported by government, primary industries and the education sectors to support learning about food and fibre production in Australian schools. Ag Career Start a recently funded project by the Australian Government whereby farmers can provide a gap year on farms and Cameron can assist with this. Food and Fibre is what they are all about. PIEFA recently received a grant to do more in NSW Schools, and we agree that we need to continue to support students and know that this is where it all begins and where we need to continue to focus on and support.

Paul Corocher – Sheep Farmer at Monkerai

You can't make a living on 100 acres and coastal sheep do not exist.

Paul is evidence that this is not true. Debt will prohibit making a living, so reduce debt. The property was run down so fertiliser, fencing, cell grazing model, increased from 360 to 900 dry sheep equivalents¹ (a means of equating sheep and cattle in a grazing situation). Sheep is the focus, backing off cattle, to now farm 200 productive ewes and 25 productive cows. This equates to 400 lambs per annum. Some infrastructure modifications. Sheep are better foragers especially the meat sheep. Fertiliser is critical, whatever type is chosen. Paul utilises every part of the land. A small flock of Dorper sheep does not fit a box so it is not always easy to sell this type of farming. Continual improvements to the system used, regenerative farming, no synthetic fertilisers are used, more chicken litter. Faecal tests are being carried out regularly as the current wet conditions are bringing many health threats. They got through the drought; the figures are testimony to the model. It is worth it – you can make a living off 100 acres of sheep!

Botanicals for Skin Care – Sarah Jobst and Jakob Mohr, Golden Sapling, Glen Martin

A family business of four. 14 years in work, started in Hornsby before moving the business to this area. Staff of 20, very much a family business based in Beresfield. They have recently purchased 200 acres in Glen Martin, and they have 2 businesses – a personal skincare and a contract manufacturing brand. It is all-natural skincare. Why they bought the land – they have found a gap in the market. We have found that there is a demand on environmental responsibility, natural, upcycling, traceability, fact-based ingredients. They have started to plant some unique natives that have not been used in skincare products before, for example “pig face”. We have recently added another business - The Golden Sapling. This is growing the plants there as a horticultural business. Specific Eucalyptus is being planted as well. Our next focus is how we can access other farmers refuse – such as an olive farmer. Where do the pits go? We can purchase these and this is where we want to head in the Ag community by using these refuse products.

¹ <https://mbfp-pastoral.mla.com.au/managing-your-feedbase/determine-carrying-capacity-and-stocking-rate/>

Julia Wokes – Duninald and Old Duninald, Paterson - Beef, Nursery and Agritourism.

Future of Farming – we do need to remember that cattle are the reason many come into the area. Beef industry brings people to the community. It has brought diversity to the area, so the Dungog Council needs to consider this industry in their planning. Animal welfare needs to form part of flood mitigation and planning. Grass fed, antibiotic free product is their focus. 200 breeders with steers sold at weaning, females sold at 500kgs. Also have a nursery operation with a focus on ferns that go all around the state. William Dun's original house still stands and has been restored to form part of the Agritourism model.

We are now focusing on some natural history and have created some forestry zones to provide habitat for the local fauna as well as guests. We wanted to ensure that there are spaces like these for our future generations.

Tracey Norman – Farmer

Self-acclaimed as a soil farmer, my interest is in the soil and biodiversity. Get smarter with farming, embrace technology. One of my aims is to show that a mixed farmer on a small parcel of land can be profitable. Spreading risk is a good strategy to support this approach. Return on investment in this shire was traditionally low in beef farming. Value adding is the future – to support the beef growing venture. Quote – we can't feed Asia, but we can be their delicatessen! What I worry about is the whole package, we have good land and marginal land. We need some more traditional agricultural activities for this land. Bridges and roads are critical as well. Economical papers have for the last 30 years stated – we need better links with Tocal, we need to continue to value add and have a focus on this. We have amazing expertise and innovators in this shire. We can learn from them and harvest this knowledge to support Agriculture and education. Dungog High School is truly a great place that our kids start at. Jobs in Agriculture is so vast. The list is extensive, the variety is there. Brain and brawn and we are selling this opportunity short. Agriculture has huge opportunity for our youth.

We need a local mini abattoir – this is an idea that needs to be explored and has more opportunity for this area. A future proofing of the area, the animal welfare, transport issue and maybe even a unique future development for Dungog. This could be the point of difference for beef farmers here in Dungog. Ethical processes, more appealing to the young families who make conscious choices when purchasing food.

Tom Christie – Nursery and Flower Shop

Started 9 years ago, growing garlic and cut flowers. We are small scale, we sell online and to the local Co-op, we also supply the IGA. We also now own The Flower Shop on Dowling Street. We are focused on the local growing, no overseas purchased flowers and garlic – the importation figures are staggering. Nearly everything we sell is grown in Australia, we try to grow as much as we can and the balance comes from the Sydney market. Costs have doubled in 2.5 years and this is a bit of a handbrake on our business and is affecting our ability to have diversity. Tom is a testament to the ability to have a successful farm on a very small acreage. Quality and uniqueness.

Questions and Comments

Sarah Crawford from the Dungog Rural Alliance - Sarah spoke about the proposed revision of the Rural Lands Strategy and LEP by Dungog Shire Council. The revision is currently not underway. There is a Facebook page: [dungogruralalliance](https://www.facebook.com/dungogruralalliance). Sarah's phone number is 0410 332 236, send her a message and she will send you some information and provide some links to assist you to be part of this all.

Annabelle Kater - The word Farming covers so much more than farming – needs to be better understood.

The new flight paths - Currently an information session will be held in Dungog at the CWA hall to discuss the new proposed flight paths.

Peter Dreyer – a comment on rebranding - this has the ability to not only bring us all together, but to give us the point of difference. A Dungog Shire brand, quality and unique

Mobile butchering, shearing and farming – Drew - Small scale farms - noted the biggest issue is limited by the workforce, and this is preventing growth, limited by the skill shortage, this is what he is hearing from his clients.

Final comment from Dungog High School - Are famers valuing their staff enough – traditionally farm workers were the “dummy” jobs. This is no longer the case and this message needs to get out there to change perceptions.

Thanks

The organising committee wish to thank the presenters who readily gave of their time and information for the forum.

Thanks also to the Dungog RSL who provided the venue at no cost.