

Wrap up of GrowAg 2016

In September, the best and brightest of Australian ag's emerging young leaders gathered at the GrowAg Summit in Albury, NSW to hear from government, industry and peers working across the fields of agribusiness, education, technology, finance and leadership.

GrowAg identified 108 emerging leaders from around Australia for inclusion in the program. It heralded a new generation of innovative thinking and problem solving as the group looked at challenges that have the potential to disrupt Australian agriculture over the next few years.

The program was deliberately set to challenge traditional views and practices in agriculture as delegates were encouraged to not only learn about new innovations – but to consider what they need to do right now to capitalise on developments in technology, smart business and leadership.

The three-day 'think tank' explored:

- how Australian agribusiness can best capitalise on global opportunities
- future innovations in technologies, markets, and products that are transforming Australian agribusiness; and
- the most effective ways to develop capable and diverse leaders needed to steer Australian agriculture into the future.

A comment from GrowAg Delegate, Reinder Prins, Wee Waa, NSW

Sponsored by the Cotton Research and Development Corporation

“What I enjoyed most was the opportunity to network with likeminded people from all different aspects of agriculture and from every corner of the country. I also thought that the line-up of speakers was excellent and very well-tailored to the discussions that GrowAg aimed to enable.

The fact that we got to brainstorm in small groups instead of just listening to speakers was great. The format was very interactive which enabled the flow of creativity and enhanced the outcomes. I have already started to utilise some of the contacts I gained at the conference, and it has reiterated to me how important research and extension is.

The format of the summit included keynote speakers, a number of breakout sessions and panel discussions, and allowed delegates the opportunity to explore key themes over the three days, and share ideas and information on what's happening in the 'real world' of Australian agriculture.”

GrowAg outcomes

Since the event, delegates have already begun to make changes to the way they approach agriculture using the ideas that came out of GrowAg, including restructuring businesses and seeking out new business opportunities, re-evaluating R&D priorities for farms and the wider ag supply chain, signing up for programs to assist with producer collaboration, arranging for greater cooperation and meetups with one another and sharing a range of online resources.

All presentations from the Summit are available via website www.rirdc.gov.au/growag

REFLECTIONS FROM GROWAG 2016



Following are key themes and issues identified by delegates at the GrowAg Summit. These are adapted from a blog post from Sarah Nolet, The Full Profile, as well as other shared delegate insights.

ENABLING INNOVATION, NOT JUST INNOVATING

It is clear that right now we are in a defining moment for agriculture in Australia. There's increasing engagement and activities from big and small players, and across the public and private sectors. And this moment is about more than innovation itself; it's also about creating the conditions within which agricultural innovations can be developed, deployed, and decidedly useful.

COLLABORATION IS THE NEW COMPETITION

Collaboration was a recurring theme throughout GrowAg, especially among the delegates themselves. Examples emerged at both a technical level, such as defining standards for interoperability, as well as a business level, such as creating partnerships between incumbent firms and startups.

No one ever outwardly rejects collaboration, but at GrowAg the often-nebulous concept started to become less theoretical and more practical. During one of the breakout sessions, we were asked to visualize Australian agriculture in 2026 as robust, innovative, successful, well-funded, abundant, affordable, and healthy. We were then asked to figure out how this future came to be. Every one of the groups identified collaboration as critical to realising this kind of future. A "common vision", "inclusive leadership", and "cohesive approaches to up-skilling and education" were consistently mentioned.

NEW VIEWS ARE CHALLENGING THE STATUS QUO

Most of the delegates mentioned new connections and exposure to new views as the biggest benefit of the conference. Of course, even the most innovative and open-minded thinkers won't change their minds or practices after a three-day event. However, delegates were consistently saying that, "GrowAg has opened my mind to new possibilities" or "I've connected with different kinds of people and started to think in new ways."

Specific examples of this changed thinking are:

- Challenging the view of a sole focus on increasing production efficiency
- Exploring the grassroots meaning of bringing the culture of innovation to rural communities, such as through informal "app-y hour" discussions among farmers
- Bringing "sexy back" to agriculture by finding ways to authentically relate to consumers, thereby decreasing polarizing messages and increasing urban empathy
- Put in practice the theory that you need to get your "house in order" and your systems working efficiently before investing in new forms of technology. One comment was, "investing in drone technology for example will not make an unproductive business more profitable."
- The next disruptive idea to shake up agriculture is likely to come from outside the sector.

- One speaker advocated that ‘the next Steve Jobs will be a farmer’, explaining that one of the biggest innovations Steve Jobs delivered was not the technology itself but providing the product at a price people could afford.
- Sixty-five per cent of kids in school today will work in jobs in the future that currently don’t exist. Rural communities need entrepreneurs who will combat the ‘brain drain’ and build global businesses from their bedrooms, creating jobs and boosting rural economies.

OTHER KEY DISCUSSION TOPICS

- Availability of high-speed internet in regional and remote locations. The group noted innovative approaches to developing own-grid systems for electricity and internet access.
- Funding the next generation of young farmers – owning land, start-ups and entrepreneurialism
- Global opportunities for Australian agriculture – how to capitalise on these opportunities, where to target effort and how to develop a value proposition for their business
- Big data – owning agriculture’s data, leveraging its valuable and using it to our advantage
- Disruptive technologies – what is coming and how can we be ready
- Transformation of Australian agribusiness – block chain, greater collaboration between production, distributor, marketer, seller and consumer.

