Learning to lead agriculture

THE production of food will become increasingly important during the coming decades.

That's why Marcus Oldham College principal Dr Simon Livingstone, Geelong, thinks it's the best time to lead agriculture.

"The United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organisation predicts that due to the increasing world population, global food production will need to double to meet demand by 2050," he said.

"This scenario, if proven right, provides Australian farmers with plenty of opportunities for the future.

"For young people considering a career in the rural sector, the future is very bright.

However, he said it was widely known there was a current skills shortage that was likely to inhibit future growth and productivity of the sector.

Dr Livingstone said an Industries Development Training and Skills Working Group report to the Primary Industries Ministerial Council outlined a long list of impediments to meeting the industry's skills shortages.

"Poor promotion of the industry, negative messages about agricultural working conditions, an ageing population, a declining rural population, low levels of industry participation in education, low numbers of graduates from tertiary courses and poor awareness of agricultural career paths were listed in the report," he said.

To young people considering entry into agriculture, Dr Livingston said these impediments may be enough to turn them away and for them to pursue alternate careers.

"But for the astute ones, the young people who think broadly about the possibilities, the enormous opportunities available for engagement, reward and success in the rural sector must be apparent and attractive," he said.

"We know there are a multitude of employment positions in agriculture, both on and off farm.

"This situation has been widely documented.

"But I believe it has not been widely communicated."

To those who choose a career in farm management, there can be significant financial reward.

"Similarly, being chief executive, pastoral inspector or managing director of an agribusiness brings significant financial reward to those prepared to work hard and perform," he said.

"Youngsters entering agriculture have a distinct advantage over entrants into other professions.

"The reason is there simply is not the number of people choosing agriculture as a profession compared to other sectors such as health, accounting and law.

"There are significantly fewer people working in agriculture who hold tertiary qualifications than in other professions.

"All of these factors provide our young entrants with plenty of opportunities."

It's about opportunity, but Dr Livingstone said this doesn't mean that the journey to be the head of an agricultural corporation or a leading farmer will not be one requiring hard work, dedication and commitment.

"Young people aspiring to be future leaders in our sector need to do the hard yards which will invariably require the completion of tertiary education, not just a degree, but possibly the completion of postgraduate studies.

"Our sector values practical skills and experience and this is a given and prerequisite for most farming operations.

"Value adding the skill set through education becomes the challenge for those wishing to move up the career path in agriculture and associated industries."

"To competently manage the complexities of business, both now and into the future will require our agricultural leaders to deal with a myriad of issues and challenges," he said.

"Rest assured, the rewards are there for new entrants who are prepared to acquire solid practical skills and experience, complemented and supported by tertiary qualifications."

■ Visit www.marcusoldham.vic.edu.au

Marcus Oldham College principal Dr Simon Livingstone says now is the best time to teach students skills that will lead agriculture.

The Land Newspaper, NSW, 2013