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Farmers & miners join forces to tackle labour needs

The farming and mining industries will need to step up joint efforts to overcome common labour supply and training issues in regional Australia to increase the availability of skilled, job-ready workers who can work across both sectors, a new report reveals.

The final report from *Australian Regional Agriculture and Mining Skills (ARAMS) Project* – a two-year joint project between the National Farmers' Federation (NFF), the Minerals Council of Australia (MCA) and the Australian Government underscores the desire for ongoing collaboration between the two industry sectors.

“Identifying joint opportunities to drive sustainable regions by nurturing and supporting workforce skills common to both sectors has been pivotal,” NFF CEO Ben Fargher said. “We need to ensure regional employees are skilled in relevant areas to meet shifting demands between agriculture and mining.”

“Ultimately, that gives regional people the best of both worlds in job and career opportunities before them, all the while strengthening the economic and social sustainability of regional communities.”

MCA CEO Mitch Hooke added: “The project demonstrates that the two great industries of regional Australia can work together to ensure that we both have well trained people.

“A key lesson from the ARAMS project is the critical importance of a collaborative approach to create a skilled and flexible workforce to meet current and changing employment needs in specific regions.”

Farming and mining confront similar problems in sourcing suitably skilled employees in regional areas. This reality precipitated the ARAMS project, which was funded by the Australian Government and brought together the two peak bodies in 2007.

This Project was the first attempt by the two industries to collaboratively examine labour and skills shortages from a regional perspective rather than a sectoral focus.

Both the NFF and MCA strongly support the report's recommendation to provide potential employees – particularly those under-represented in the rural and regional job market, such as school leavers and Indigenous Australians – with skills-based training that is transportable between the two sectors.

“The point is to make those people ‘job ready’ and give them the ability to swap between the two sectors as opportunities and needs arise,” Mr Fargher noted.

“Through this project we have developed, and are implementing, an industry-backed needs-driven skills, training and employment strategy for regional Australia,” Mr Hooke added. “It is also a means of ensuring that we build and maintain sustainable regional communities.”

The NFF and MCA will continue to work with the Australian Government to promote better information for employers on programs to resolve workforce shortages with a regional, rather than a national focus, as a one-size-fits-all approach often fails regional Australia's workforce needs.

The NFF and MCA will also work together to promote strategies aimed at improving resources and building capabilities in regional leadership, collaboration and planning.

This will be critical to attracting and retaining a suitably skilled workforce appropriate to the needs of regional Australia's two most important sectors – agriculture and mining. The NFF and MCA will continue to collaborate on attracting, retaining, developing and deploying labour in regional areas.

The *ARAMS Project Report* is available at: www.nff.org.au and www.minerals.org.au.

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