



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

**MOTIONS**

**Careers in Agriculture**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 19 March 2012**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Monday, 19 March 2012  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Ley, Sussan, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Ms LEY** (Farrer) (12:06): I am delighted to speak on this motion moved by my friend and colleague the member for Murray. Globally, agricultural commodity prices are expected to continue to remain strong. Rural exports increased 4.7 per cent in the December 2011 quarter. The gross value of Australian farm production in 2010-11 was \$48.7 billion. There are approximately 134,000 farm businesses in Australia, and Australian farms produce almost 93 per cent of Australia's domestic food supply. It was indeed agriculture, not mining, that saved this country from the global financial crisis.

The opportunities offered by the agricultural sector are enormous. Huge and increasing demand by our Asian neighbours provides Australia with a market on our doorstep. As these nations become more affluent, so their demand for the high-quality produce of Australia will grow. Unfortunately, far too many employment opportunities in the sector go begging. Australians are not seriously considering the benefits of working in the agricultural sector. And it is not just one-sided. I do not believe that the institutions that offer courses are truly stepping up to the plate. It is well known that it is expensive to offer courses in agriculture. It is expensive to take students to visit the areas where they might one day work in agricultural science. It is expensive to bring that expertise into a university, which is why the regional universities are so well placed to do this. But Hawkesbury Agricultural College was unable to offer a first-year program this year, as fewer than 10 students had enrolled. Unfortunately this is a growing trend. With Australia failing to graduate sufficient students to fill the available positions, 2.5 jobs go begging for every student that graduates.

The array of possible jobs on offer is incredibly vast. Agricultural college students learn about animal husbandry, weather patterns, environmental issues and farm management. There is a strong science focus, meaning that those who will work with our farmers of the future have incredible knowledge and expertise.

*A division having been called in the House of Representatives—*

**Sitting suspended from 12 : 08 to 12 : 33**

**Ms LEY:** My own electorate of Farrer is built on agricultural foundations: cattle; cereals; wheat; rice; grapevines, citrus, table grapes and other forms of horticulture; vegetables; and sheep. On the topic of sheep I should mention that the town of Booligal celebrates the annual sheep races on Easter Saturday and even provides the opportunity for you to hire a sheep for the day if you would like to. Deniliquin is also prime sheep country, close to the home of the original Peppin Merino sheep. A hundred and fifty years ago the Peppin brothers managed to breed a merino better suited to the hot and dry plains of western NSW, and they certainly succeeded.

Innovation, of course, is the key to the continuing encouragement and forward momentum of the agriculture sector. The main innovators apart from farmers—they do not need to go anywhere to be innovators, but many of them have completed agricultural science degrees—are the people who work with them in the local and state departments of agriculture. They are the people who need to have the technical training to enable them to bring to the innovation task the tools to really drive forward the agriculture sector in this country. That is why the workforce issues around our jobs in agriculture lead back to the planning issues, which are where the training task that has to be done by agricultural colleges, schools and universities is failing so very, very badly. I am very pleased that the member for Murray has brought this motion to the House today. As I mentioned in my remarks before the division, it is not easy for agricultural colleges to run courses, but I encourage them to do just that. Everywhere you look, you see courses in environmental science, and, important though that is, it is really not the whole answer. In rural Australia we have a plethora of environmental science courses, and I meet graduates when I attend university graduation ceremonies—many brilliant people are now very well trained in environmental science—but I wish that there were more agricultural science on offer. I hope that the current government can listen to the words that have been spoken on this motion. On our side of politics, with many members from rural areas, we are very, very committed to this task. We look forward to promoting agricultural graduates into the future. In this, the Year of the Farmer, we must do more to celebrate the agriculture sector.