



MEDIA RELEASE
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Awards highlight SA's bright future in agriculture

A Mid North visionary focused on the sustainable co-existence of productive agriculture and functioning ecosystems and a Kimba stud operations manager keen to see precision livestock become common practice have been recognised as future leaders of South Australian agriculture at the 2018 Spirit of Excellence in Agriculture Awards announced on Thursday, October 18, 2018.

Minister for Environment and Water David Speirs, and Primary Industries and Regions (PIRSA) Chief Executive Scott Ashby, presented the Agricultural Bureau of South Australia Awards at a dinner at the Arkaba Hotel this evening.

Generously supported by the Department for Environment and Water (DEW) and Primary Industries and Regions (PIRSA), the Awards offer young farmers and rural youth the opportunity to pursue personal and professional development to benefit their local communities.

Chair of the Agricultural Bureau of South Australia, Mark Grossman says the Bureau is proud to encourage and support rural youth who are working not only in primary production but in careers that sustain rural communities.

“Going by how challenging it was for the judges to decide on the winners this year, the future of agriculture in our state could not be brighter,” said Mark. “The standard of applications was the highest we’ve seen and we heartily congratulate all the finalists.”

A few of the standout projects and ideas from this year’s finalists included the hosting of a local sustainable agriculture conference; building up a pasture raised poultry business to enhance a cattle grazing enterprise; and growing industrial hemp in rotations between crops and pastures to help boost organic material and soil health.

Ruth Sommerville from Spalding is the recipient of the 2018 Sustainable Agriculture Scholarship.

The \$8000 scholarship is for a farmer (aged 18-40) to pursue further study, take a study tour or run a special project. The scholarship is in memory of the late Peter and Wendy Olsen to recognise both of their contributions to agriculture and landcare in South Australia. Sponsored by the Department for Environment and Water (DEW), the scholarship focuses on sustainability of the natural resources that underpin primary production.

Seeing productive agriculture and functioning ecosystems co-exist in a sustainable partnership in broadacre cropping is a clear vision for Ruth and the motivation behind her 2018 Sustainable Agriculture Scholarship application.

Ruth lives with husband Damien and their three children (aged 6, 3 and 1) at Spalding in the Mid North. With two other families they farm over 3000 hectares of mainly arable land, growing wheat, barley, canola and oats.

Off farm, Ruth runs a consulting business that provides technical support and management services to projects and groups working on environmental and agricultural research, restoration or

management activities. She also contributes to the Northern and Yorke NRM Board and has volunteered her expertise with local landholders to help scope landscape restoration processes, source funding and implement successful projects.

Ruth says that winning the 2018 Sustainable Agriculture Scholarship means she can now forge ahead with building up her knowledge and understanding of managing ecosystems to improve productivity. In particular, to identify and quantify synergies between improving ecological function and the provision of agricultural services.

"I believe for agriculture to be truly profitable and sustainable we need to modify the system so land managers see all aspects of their landscape as providing services, as valuable," Ruth said. "That we place a value on having functioning wildlife corridors and water courses; that land managers understand the energy, water and biological cycles on their property and are able to improve the overall resilience of their land and the broader landscape and community that relies on it."

The 2018 Sustainable Agriculture Scholarship will allow Ruth to attend the 2018 Australian Wildlife Management Society Conference in Tasmania in December, where the theme will be 'Integrating wildlife management, nature conservation and production in land, river and seascapes'.

"I will use the knowledge gained to improve our own land management, but to also extend this message to farmers in our local district and across the state through my consultancy and my involvement in Landcare and the Farming Systems Groups," Ruth said.

"This will educate and hopefully engage farmers in improving their management of the energy, water and biological cycles on their properties. It will hopefully also lead to more resilient farm enterprises that are therefore more productive and profitable."

Another aspect of Ruth's scholarship win will be the opportunity to learn firsthand from the Land to Market scheme, a grassroots, farmer-driven market transformation program in NSW that identifies and addresses the need and emerging demand for ecological outcomes verification.

Ruth is planning a tour to meet with Land to Market members to identify how their model is benefitting broadacre operations and explore the potential for broadening the network to create a cropping/mixed farming model. Ultimately Ruth is keen to see this ecological model extended to more farming operations across Australia, including in South Australia.

Ruth also wants to review current literature on regenerative agriculture in Australia and its relevance to mixed farming and broadacre cropping operations. She then plans to share her findings by publishing and presenting a report at a relevant conference or event.

Luke Ramsay from Kimba on the Eyre Peninsula was awarded the 2018 Rural Youth Bursary sponsored by Primary Industries and Regions SA (PIRSA).

A vision to see precision livestock become common practice and to help farmers more easily measure production traits to improve profits is the inspiration behind Luke's application.

A stud operations manager at Karawatha Park Merinos near Kimba, Luke's work sees him involved with data collation and management which complement the stud rams with Australian Sheep Breeding Value (ASBV), an estimated breeding value for an animal based on its pedigree and performance records.

Luke also is building his own data management business to help farmers with recording and managing their sheep flocks with objective measurements. As part of this he is conducting a sheep data management trial which aims to demonstrate the improvements that can be made to genetics and profit by using data to assist in ewe selection.

Luke will use the \$5000 Rural Youth Bursary towards developing a precision guide for sheep farmers that will easily record data including fleece, micron and body weight measurements. This valuable data can then be made available by sellers to prospective purchasers.

Already in regular contact with several sheep data management companies in NSW, Luke's win will allow him to take a trip east to observe and learn from existing practices.

A relative newcomer to Kimba, Luke's impressive application is supported by the fact he has given several talks on precision livestock to local farming groups, with the responses enthusiastic.

"The Kimba community is full of many progressive farmers from very diverse backgrounds," Luke writes in his application. "It is a hugely farming based community and extremely welcoming after being here only a few months."

Tonight's ceremony also saw grain farmer and industry advocate Tristan Baldock, also of Kimba, honoured with the 2018 Services to Primary Production Award.

Tristan is heavily involved in the grains industry, contributing to agricultural research and policy to benefit farmers both locally and nationally.

Tristan recently represented Australian grain growers and supported Federal Agriculture Minister David Littleproud on a visit to Argentina to engage young farmers and ag professionals to develop solutions to strengthen bilateral relationships.

Closer to home, Tristan's contributions include managing the Buckleboo Farm Improvement Group's research, development and extension program. He also is one of the local growers behind the vision to create a community owned multi-user grain facility in Kimba, with the ultimate aim of delivering jobs and better farm gate returns.

At a national level Tristan is a member of the Grains Research and Development Corporation's (GRDC) low rainfall zone Regional Cropping Solutions Network and the National Policy Group of Grain Growers Limited.

Many local producers will have met Tristan after he was tasked with helping the Lower Eyre Peninsula recover from the then most devastating fire the state had seen in 20 years. He had not long graduated with an Honours Degree researching the long-term effects of no-till farming on soil nitrogen cycling. Tristan's research interests led to extensive pasture evaluations to fast track the most suitable species to revegetate the lunar-like landscape.

For more information on the 2018 Spirit of Excellence in Agriculture Awards or to arrange interviews with the winners please contact:

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AWARD SPONSORS:

The [Sustainable Agriculture Scholarship for Farmers](#) is sponsored by the Department for Environment and Water (DEW)

The [Rural Youth Bursary](#) is sponsored by Primary Industries and Regions SA (PIRSA)



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