



## Hand them back, AgForce tells Government

Monday 10 December 2018

AgForce Queensland Farmers has demanded the Queensland Government hand the agricultural colleges at Longreach and Emerald back to industry if their bureaucracy is unable to successfully and sustainably manage them.

AgForce has acted quickly to save the iconic colleges after the State Government's surprise decision last week to close them, a move which drew widespread disbelief and outrage from producers and communities throughout rural Queensland.

AgForce General President Georgie Somerset says the colleges are too important to agriculture, and to the many rural and regional communities that depend on agriculture, to allow them to be axed.

"We believe these are unique, irreplaceable assets and we are currently engaging with organisations and community groups around the State to elicit their support and ideas to save them," says Mrs Somerset.

"The response so far has been overwhelmingly in favour of an industry-led solution.

"AgForce's plan is to overhaul these institutions and the services they offer to form the backbone of a comprehensive, future-looking rural research and education system that offers benefits beyond agriculture.

"These well-equipped colleges, with their unique locations and infrastructure, offer opportunities to support profitable and sustainable agriculture in areas like carbon-neutral farming, drought mitigation, flora and fauna conservation, reef preservation and increased indigenous and female participation."

Mrs Somerset says this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for agriculture.

"AgForce strongly believes it is time for much-needed reform to the education and skills training available to rural Queenslanders, especially agriculture-specific curriculum," she says.

"But the Government has thrown its hands in the air and, without any industry consultation, decided to close the colleges because they cannot make them relevant to the end user.

"We firmly believe that industry itself is best placed to oversee innovative, outcomes-focused research, education and skills training that will ensure broadacre agriculture continue to grow as a world leader.

"As the peak body for broadacre agriculture – and Australia's only State farming organisation accredited as an RTO – AgForce has the expertise, the will and the remit to lead this initiative.

"We are already having informative discussions with producers, community organisations, Councils, MPs and others throughout Queensland, as well as with other primary producer peak bodies.

"The reaction we are getting is tremendously encouraging and gives us great confidence that not only are we doing the right thing, but that, with the support of rural and regional Queensland, we can make this work.

"People in the bush are accustomed to looking out for themselves when Government fails to listen or act, and this is another example of us stepping up to secure the future of our industry, and its multi-billion contribution to the State economy."

Ends.

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