



IN this issue you will read about a spectacular rise in demand for Ag degrees across Australia. Universities in each state are enjoying a big spike in enrolments in agricultural science courses, as young people take advantage of lower fees and good job prospects.



The new enrollees are not silly, they are signing up for the Ag courses for a number of reasons:

- There are now lower fees for Ag degrees. Last June, the federal government announced agriculture students would pay less for their degrees. The proposed student contribution for 2021 is \$3700 — nearly \$6000 cheaper than it was in 2020;
- While Covid-19 trampled on most sectors of the economy last year, agriculture has thrived;
- It seems there are three to four jobs available per Ag graduate; and,
- The one I really like is that (as one commentator succinctly put it) – Agriculture's not 'plough and cow' these days. It's actually high tech and high business and high in job satisfaction!

I don't know how you feel, but I find I really appreciate living in the country when I can't. I had to travel across a number of state borders in recent times into metropolitan areas. All above board, all with the proper Border Declaration Passes and all with the prospect that said borders could slam shut behind or in front of me within a matter of a few hours.

The city centres are not what they used to be – gone is the hustle and bustle, gone are the bright lights and gone are the downtown entertainment and dining venues. The suburbs on the other hand are perhaps not 'jumping' – but they are cautiously, if perhaps a little suspiciously, moving along. All those out and about are wearing their masks and all maintaining their social distancing.

Don't get me wrong, I believe it's a very good thing for the nation that they do. It's just that back home, in our small country town we are fortunate that the people we see each

day are, for the greater part, people we know and people we trust to do the right thing – and largely they do.

So, I'm not surprised that the smart kids have worked out that a career in Ag based out in country areas is a smart thing to pursue.

Witness the crowd at the Case IH Next Gen StepUP! Conference in Bundaberg. A very strong program with very good speakers, and the next genners were all over it – and they still managed to have a great time 'networking'.

You may have done a little 'networking' of perhaps a more subdued kind over the New Year period. As I sipped my hot chocolate, I couldn't help but notice that 2020 copped a lot of stick. I would go as far as to say no New Year's Eve broadcast – or individual greeting for that matter – was complete without a bagging out of what 2020 had delivered.

What it did deliver was a bumper crop of weird and wonderful science yarns – some of which you would have come across in this publication because my mind works that way. I was delighted to discover a few additional gems from the Australian Science Media Centre, you'll find them in this issue. And, in my defence, I would argue they have at least some relationship to agriculture – nearly.

I mean to say, who could resist reporting on a science experiment that involves vibrating a slightly drunk earthworm on a sub-woofer speaker in a rural Victorian backyard shed during the Covid lockdown?

Or for that matter, consider the story of the Aussie caterpillar that literally has its head up its backside – or at least it looks that way. As the caterpillar grows towards moth-hood, it moults and sheds its exoskeleton many times. But this is one very environmentally conscious critter – rather than just dumping the old heads it recycles them, leaving each ex-head stuck to the top of its new one.

You won't find stories like these in the cities, you have to go bush – it's good for the soul, and your sanity!

In this issue...



Climate change, Covid and leadership

Whatever the cause, climate change is here as a clear and present challenge – and so is Covid-19. One of our top 'medicos' suggest we should give it the same attention as we have the pandemic.



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2020 was certainly a weird year

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Birth of the tractor

We of today tend to adopt the somewhat presumptuous philosophy that, because our generation discovered the virtues of the silicon chip, we are more intelligent than those who preceded us. As legions of satellites create celestial traffic jams in our ungodly heavens, we are usually too preoccupied with our own importance to bother reflecting on the past.



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