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Disclaimer: *Ethos* is published quarterly by Social Education Victoria. Registration No: A0016113Y. ABN 49 458 215 576

ISSN 2202-7521

Contributions including letters to the editor, articles and resources are welcome and should be sent to the editor at SEV for consideration. This publication has been prepared for the members and professional associates of SEV. The opinions expressed in the publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of SEV or the Editorial Committee.

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Contact the editor: c/o SEV, 150 Palmerston Street, Carlton VIC 3053 or by email: ethos@sev.asn.au

Vision statement:

Social Education Victoria holds that Social Education is an essential component of a balanced P-12 curriculum as it develops critical understandings, values and skills which are essential learning for all students.

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1. The *Steve Irwin* at sea. Photo courtesy of Sea Shepherd.

2. Military Crackdown in Ngaba, Tibet in 2011.

Author: SFT HQ (Students for a Free Tibet)
Wikimedia Commons.

Education for Sustainable Food and Fibre Production: Everybody's Business

Stuart Hemmings and John Halsey, Primary Industries Education Foundation Australia



Dr John Halsey is Professor of Rural Education and Communities at Flinders University, South Australia and Non-executive Director of the Primary Industries Education Foundation Australia



Stuart Hemmings is an education consultant and Non-executive Director of the Primary Industries Education Foundation Australia

There are few things more essential to life than safe, nutritious and affordable food, reliable shelter and fabrics and clothing derived from natural fibres.

Globally, sustainable food and fibre production and distribution are very big challenges, particularly given population growth and, with this, continuing pressures being placed on fertile land and reliable water supplies.

The need to continually ensure our Australian community remains informed about these challenges, particularly in circumstances where there may be a variety of often polarised viewpoints presented on issues, is an important role for all educators.

Implications of the Australian Curriculum

Those who have been following the development of the Australian Curriculum will no doubt be aware of the debate, jockeying and political manoeuvring involved where particular content is being prescribed.

Education about Australia's primary industries (including agriculture, forestry and fisheries) remains as important today to our community as it has been in the past. Many would argue that with our increasing focus on food safety and security, sustainable production methods and the need

for ongoing scientific and technological innovation in the industry, the role for education in this area has never been more important.

It is somewhat heartening to note that governments, at the state and federal levels, have recently undertaken reviews into agricultural education, such as those in Victoria and most recently the *Review into Agricultural Education and Training in New South Wales* by Professor Jim Pratley.

At the same time, the Commonwealth Government has released policy positions, such as the *National Food Plan: Our food future*, while organisations such as the National Farmer's Federation have published a *Blueprint for Australian Agriculture*, both of which make references to the importance of education and training, along with sustainability.

Clearly, there has been a recent refocus on the significance, both now and into the future, of Australia's primary industries sector and its importance for economic growth, food and fibre production and recognition of our nation's role as an important global citizen.

A broadly-educated community, in addition to specialist education and training from school through to tertiary level, in the area of primary industries and related professions and vocations, is required. This would ensure a sustainable, skilled and innovative work force, in scientific and technical roles in both production and marketing sectors.

The added effects of a vibrant, innovative and productive primary industries sector on sustaining rural and regional communities, and the benefits this brings to the provision of services in those areas, including education, goes without saying.

It was therefore pleasing that following the consultation period for the development of the Australian Curriculum, the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) genuinely responded to representations from advocates for the primary industries sector, including the Primary Industries Education Foundation Australia (PIEFA).

In the initial drafts of the Australian Curriculum, the only references to food and fibre production were medieval agricultural practices in Europe. The only mention of forestry production was the deforestation of Rapa Nui and how that led to the collapse of the civilisation, and there was no mention of fisheries.

In the latest documents, there are 164 inclusions of food and fibre production at the content descriptor level. This is a very welcome development.

A foundation for a sustainable future

Driving the food and fibre produced each year in Australia is a huge and diverse range of industries – from the family farm through to latest high-technology plant breeding, to state-of-the-art processing and distribution – and a large, highly skilled workforce.

With more and more people losing a direct connection with where food and fibre comes from and how they are produced, it is critically important that children learn about these while at school.

Historically, schools and education have been used to reinforce values and attitudes about national priorities as well as deal with emerging challenges and problems. Reflecting back over the last half century, examples include sex education to deal with sexuality and sexually-transmitted diseases, consumer education to make students more informed consumers, environmental education to bring the natural world into the foreground of thinking and action, and parent education for pre-schoolers to ensure children get a 'better start to life'.

As for these types of issues, mass media also plays a critical role in shaping perceptions of issues related to food and fibre. Additionally, social media is increasingly informing community views around a wide range of matters such as how best to respond to Australia's ageing farming/agricultural sector workforce.

Social media also has huge potential to introduce young (and not so young) to the many challenges, opportunities and career pathways in the many food and fibre industries.

However, to ensure there is accurate and timely information available to inform discussion and debate, teachers and schools need top quality, factual and authentic resources.

The Primary Industries Education Foundation Australia was established to develop and provide teachers with high-quality, 'easy-to-access/easy-to-use' food and fibre curriculum support materials. PIEFA is a not-for-profit company with a vision to ensure an Australian community that understands and values its primary industries. Further information about the Foundation can be obtained from its website at <http://www.primaryindustrieseducation.com.au>.

Research done by the Australian Centre for Educational Research (ACER) in 2011 (commissioned by PIEFA) reinforces the need for accurate, engaging teaching and learning materials. This widely published and often

referenced *Food, Fibre and the Future: Report on surveys of students' and teachers' knowledge and understanding of primary industries* revealed for example, that 27% of Year 6 students said yoghurt was a plant product, while 42% of Year 10 students said cotton socks were a product from animals.

Historically, most states and territories have had parts of the curriculum that included the study of agriculture in some form, although often this has not been a mandatory area. To a lesser degree, limited studies of plant and animal production, agricultural technologies or other areas related to agriculture, forestry or fisheries might have been studied in the science, social science or technology curriculum areas.

Specially-trained secondary school agriculture teachers have been involved in delivering food and fibre education and training for many years, supported by the provision of resources and professional development provided by systems and industry bodies. However, the content descriptions included in the Australian Curriculum now extend the need for professional learning and resource provision to the full spectrum of teachers in a variety of curriculum areas from Foundation to Year 12.

As the peak body in Australia for Primary Industries education, PIEFA's role becomes more important in supporting all teachers across Australia.

As an organisation that links the primary industries, government and education sectors, through its members, PIEFA is well placed to ensure that resources are developed for teachers aligned to the Australian Curriculum content statements and in a form that is designed by teachers for teachers.

Most recently, PIEFA in liaison with Education Services Australia has produced a number of resources for teachers through funding provided by the Commonwealth's Agriculture in Education Initiative that was announced in the Mid Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook in December 2013.

This work will result in the availability of online support materials for teachers ([Scootle](#)) and other curriculum resources to help teachers better understand the products and processes associated with food and fibre production. Units of inquiry and video materials across a range of industry areas have been developed, covering content descriptions spanning a range of learning areas.

This will add to the significant number of resources already available for the teaching of food and fibre education that are discoverable online, including some more recent units of inquiry specifically developed by PIEFA for the Australian Curriculum.

The Foundation's resource website, PRIMEZONE, is easy to navigate and user-friendly and has hundreds of downloadable resources available free of charge. Just visit <http://www.primezone.edu.au/> and take a look.

National and international significance

Food and fibre production and security are inextricably linked to the principal social, political, economic and cultural dimensions of our society as well as to environmental health, well-being and sustainability.

Food and fibre production and security are not discretionary items of national policy or of national productivity. As Pretty (2002, p.11) argues, “[without food [and fibre], we are clearly nothing. [This] is not a lifestyle or add-on fashion statement”.

Ensuring that Australia remains a country that is food and fibre secure and is able to contribute to the growing global demand for high quality produce, requires a populace which is well informed and values its primary industries.

The Australian Curriculum, through the inclusion of cross-curriculum priorities, general capabilities and content elaborations related to food and fibre now makes it every teacher's business to further develop their repertoire to include knowledge and skills in Australia's primary industries.

Food and fibre education has always included a consideration by students of the delicate balance between economic, social and environmental sustainability in primary industries production and marketing systems. Now, the inclusion of a sustainability priority in the Australian Curriculum has allowed for a definitive focus on this in a primary industries context across all years of schooling.

It is hoped that any modification that may result from the recent government commissioned review of the Australian Curriculum maintains the inclusion of mandatory food and fibre content. This will ensure students in Australian primary and secondary schools are educated about the value and importance of primary industries, not only to themselves and the country they live in, but to feeding our ever-increasing global population.

It is in this space that PIEFA, in association with its members from the education and industry sectors, seeks to inform and continue to provide educators with access to high-quality, low-cost, current and practical resources that are engaging and aligned to the Australian Curriculum.

If you would like to know more about teaching and learning resources to help progress this critically important national goal, or wish to become involved in any other

PIEFA



areas of the Foundation's work, visit the PRIMEZONE website, PIEFA's website <http://www.primaryindustrieseducation.com.au> or contact the Primary Industries Education Foundation Australia Chief Executive Officer, Mr Ben Stockwin ceo@primaryindustrieseducation.com.au

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