

# **Inclusive Prosperity**

**Cultivating the Next  
Generation: Agriculture  
as a Foundation for  
Future Prosperity**

**2026**



Photo (L-R): IAG CEO, Nick Hawkins, Minister Jarvis, Mckell WA Exec Director, Jess Bukowski

## **Mckell WA's Inclusive Prosperity Series**

The Western Australian Government has made an ambitious commitment to transform and diversify the state's economy. Mckell WA's Inclusive Prosperity series explores how emerging and established industries can drive economic growth while ensuring the benefits are broadly shared.

**Event 3: Cultivating the Next Generation: Agriculture as a Foundation for Future Prosperity with Hon. Jackie Jarvis, MLC, Minister for Agriculture and Food; Fisheries; Forestry; Small Business; Mid West**

Exploring how workforce renewal, farm safety and innovation, and regional economic resilience, with a particular focus on ensuring the next chapter of agricultural growth is genuinely inclusive.

Thank you to IAG for generously hosting the event.



## The Minister's Speech

Minister Jarvis positioned agriculture as both a foundational industry and a sector undergoing profound transformation.

Agriculture remains WA's second largest export industry, deeply embedded in regional economies and global food systems. However, its future will depend on how effectively the sector adapts to structural, environmental and workforce challenges.

**“Agriculture’s greatest strength is its people...  
and its future depends on the next generation  
choosing to build careers in the sector.”**

### A Modern, Innovative Sector

The Minister emphasised that agriculture in WA is increasingly:

- Technology-driven
- Science-led, leveraging genetics, plant science, aquaculture innovation
- Export-oriented and globally competitive

This is reflected in record output:

**WA’s grain harvest reached 27.3 million tonnes, up from  
~18 million a decade ago**

## Workforce Renewal and Skills

A central theme was the need to attract and retain the next generation:

- Strong pipeline of early-career scientists and researchers, particularly through Department Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD)
- Investment in PhD and postgraduate programs to build long-term capability
- Recognition that workforce ageing and seasonal employment structures present challenges

## Diversity and Inclusion

The Minister highlighted:

- Growing participation of women and international talent
- The need to further improve inclusion
- The importance of presenting agriculture as a modern, values-aligned career path

## Global Pressures and System Risks

The sector is navigating:

- Climate variability and extreme weather
- Biosecurity threats
- Supply chain disruption
- Emerging risks such as fertiliser shortages

These pressures reinforce the need for resilience, innovation, and workforce capability.



## Panel of experts



**Hon. Jackie Jarvis MLC**

Minister for Agriculture and Food;  
Fisheries; Forestry; Small Business;  
Mid West



**Stevi Howdle**

Executive Officer, Farmsafe



**Richard Kohne**

COO, Seafood  
Harvest Road



**Kendall Galbraith**

CEO  
Rural, Regional and Remote  
Women's Network



Photo (L-R): Stevi Howdle, Richard Khone, Minister Jarvis, Jess Bukowski, Kendall Galbraith

## Highlights of Panel Discussion

### 1. Workforce Participation and Inclusion

Workforce shortages persist across regions and subsectors

- Greater focus needed on:
  - Women's participation and leadership
  - Supporting young people entering agriculture
  - Creating clear career pathways

There was a strong emphasis on inclusive growth, ensuring regional communities are not just sites of production, but places where people can build sustainable careers and lives.

**“We need visible recognition of all the skills that contribute to this industry. So it's not just being on the farm and driving a tractor and doing fertiliser it's accounting, tech and marketing ...”**

Kendall Galbraith, RRR Network

## 2. Regional Liveability and Community Resilience

Panelists highlighted that many challenges facing metropolitan Australia are more acute in regional areas, including:

- Access to services
- Workforce attraction and retention
- Infrastructure gaps

Structural shifts are reshaping regional communities:

- Fewer people living on farms
- Rise of drive-in, drive-out farming models
- Declining population in smaller towns

This reinforces the importance of:

- Strong regional hubs (e.g. Geraldton, Albany, Northam)
- Investment in liveability to support surrounding communities

**“We’ve got less than a million people spread across a land mass one third the size of Australia.”**

**Minister Jarvis**

## 4. Mental Health, Safety and Workforce Sustainability

Agriculture faces significant challenges in worker wellbeing and safety:

- Isolation and limited access to services in remote areas
- High levels of psychological stress
- Persistent safety risks across farming operations

Key insights:

- Need for tailored mental health services for regional communities
- Importance of embedding safety culture across the sector
- Recognition that workforce sustainability depends on both physical and mental wellbeing

**“We’re asking people to do incredibly broad roles, while also trying to keep their families safe.”**

**Stevi Howdle, Farmsafe**

## 4. Industry Connection and Sector Identity

The panel identified a need to strengthen connection across the value chain:

- Better integration between producers, processors, researchers and markets
- Greater visibility of career pathways into agriculture

Agriculture is still often perceived as traditional, male-dominated and high-risk, rather than innovative, technology-enabled and offering diverse and meaningful careers.

Shifting this narrative is critical to attracting the next generation.

## 5. Innovation, Value-Adding and Supply Chains

Discussion highlighted opportunities to:

- Strengthen local processing and value-adding
- Reduce reliance on interstate or global supply chains
- Build greater resilience in food systems

Examples raised included:

- Gaps in local processing capacity
- Missed opportunities to retain value within WA
- Exposure to global market disruptions

**“Bringing the whole value chain together helps solve some of the sector’s biggest challenges.”**

Richard Khone, Harvest Road



# McKell Institute's Research

Over the years, McKell has explored many issues that are relevant to the challenges and opportunities across agriculture and regional Australia.

## **Blue Harvest, 2020**

This investigative report explored the nature of underpayment and worker exploitation in northern NSW's blueberry industry.

[Read the report: Blue Harvest](#)

## **Licensing Labour Hire, 2025**

Building on the Blue Harvest report, this report outlined desirable attributes of this new labour hire licensing framework. Supported by a combination of business and unions, it considered how the framework could ensure both workers and businesses within Australian horticulture are protected under the scheme.

[Read the report: Licensing Labour Hire](#)

## **The Up-Skill Battle, 2023**

NSW's regional and rural skills crisis has been compounded in recent years by tight labour market conditions. This report considered the challenge and offered number of targeted measures aimed at alleviating regional skills shortages and incentivising key workers to live in rural NSW.

[Read the report: The Up-Skill Battle](#)

“Agriculture today sits at the intersection of many of the issues shaping our economy: export competitiveness, diversity and workforce renewal, innovation and climate change.”

Jess Bukowski, Executive Director, McKell WA

## What's next?

The Minister's remarks and panel discussion reinforced:

- Workforce is the defining challenge: attracting, retaining and supporting people will determine the sector's future
- Regional resilience is central: thriving agricultural industries require strong, liveable communities
- Innovation is already transforming the sector, but must be matched by workforce capability
- Inclusion is an economic imperative, not just a social one

We hope to extend these ideas in our policy research.

Our **Inclusive Prosperity Series** will continue throughout 2026, as we discuss and debate the Government's economic diversification agenda.

At McKell Institute WA, our focus will remain on the people; exploring how these emerging, often complex, industries can not only drive massive economic growth but also ensure the benefits are shared equitably across our state.





Jess Bukowski, Executive Director  
[jessica.bukowski@mckellinstitute.org.au](mailto:jessica.bukowski@mckellinstitute.org.au)  
0420 528 355