



Rabobank

*Media release
July 23, 2014*

Survey of city teens highlights ‘concerning’ Australian urban-rural divide

Key findings:

- 77 per cent of city teenagers know little or nothing about farming and food production.
- 17 per cent never been on a farm; overall two-thirds visited a farm less than three times in their life.
- 68 per cent don’t know, or know only a little, about how food gets from farm to plate.
- More than 90 per cent, however, perceive farming and food production as very important to Australia.
- Careers in agriculture rate lower than many other occupations.

A new survey of city teenagers has further highlighted Australia’s ‘urban-rural divide’, finding 77 per cent of those surveyed know only ‘a little’ or ‘nothing at all’ about farming and food production.

The research – commissioned by agricultural banking specialist Rabobank – has also revealed 17 per cent of urban teenagers surveyed have never been on a farm, while a further 50 per cent have only been to a farm three or less times in their life.

However, most still perceived farming and food production as extremely or very important to the nation.

Conducted by House of Brand, the ***Rabobank Farm Experience Urban Youth Research*** surveyed 600 students aged 15 to 18, from major Australian capital cities – including Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth – and currently attending government and non-government schools.

Rabobank Australia and New Zealand head of Sustainable Business Development Marc Oostdijk says the research showed a “concerning knowledge gap” among Australian youth when it comes to agriculture and food production.

Mr Oostdijk says Rabobank had conducted the research as the bank, and its farming clients, had a genuine concern that the next generation of Australians may not understand or appreciate the role of agriculture in the nation’s economy and future.

“It is also important to help bridge this disconnect between city and rural communities in order to attract young people to work in agriculture and become part of securing the sector’s future,” Mr Oostdijk says.

“The very limited exposure many young people in Australian cities have to farming and where their food and agricultural produce comes from was clearly identified in this



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research, with the survey showing two thirds of city teenagers have had very limited direct farm access, and some none at all.

“Rabobank has always maintained a strong connection with the communities in which it operates. This unique approach to engaging with rural communities has been further strengthened by an initiative that brings together progressive farmers across the country for open discussions on their concerns in agriculture.”

Rabobank’s Client Council network conveyed concerns about retaining and attracting youth within the agricultural industry, which prompted the Rabobank Farm Experience Urban Youth Research study, coordinated with House of Brand.

Paddock to plate

Almost 20 per cent of teenagers in the survey says they “don’t really know anything” about “how food gets from the farm to my plate”, while 49 per cent knew only “a little”.

Mr Oostdijk says while there was generally low awareness of the food production process among the teenagers, it was more acute once produce and ingredients had left the farm.

“When it comes to what happens to the ingredients and produce once they leave the farm, 28 per cent of respondents says they know nothing about this and 47 per cent says they only know ‘a little bit’,” he says.

A third of the teenagers did not know how food ingredients and produce were packaged and got to the supermarket, while 45 per cent knew only a little about this.

In terms of farm activity, 20 per cent did not know what farmers needed to do to grow ingredients and produce, while 49 per cent says they only had a little understanding. However, 27 per cent knew “quite a bit” about this and three per cent a “great deal”.

Mr Oostdijk says there was little difference in the overall knowledge levels among government and non-government students.

However, knowledge and understanding of farming and food production was considerably higher among the students who had spent more time on farms, he says.

“Those who had visited farms five or more times in their lives reported being considerably more knowledgeable about food production,” he says.

Perception of agriculture

Mr Oostdijk says that while the survey showed there were considerable knowledge gaps in relation to agriculture, it was encouraging that most urban teenagers surveyed perceived farming and food production as extremely or very important to Australia.



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Sixty per cent believed farming was “extremely important” to Australia and 39 per cent says the impact would be “significant” if there was no farming in Australia.

“Pleasingly 93 per cent had positive associations with farming, primarily around the themes of fresh food and agriculture being good for the local economy,” Mr Oostdijk says.

“Negative associations were around issues like drought, low pay and animal management issues.”

The survey found one in five of the city teenagers was “extremely” or “very” interested in finding out more about agriculture, while a further two in five was “somewhat interested”.

“Encouragingly, those more knowledgeable about farming were still more interested in finding out more about the industry; however those who hadn’t visited a farm were less interested,” Mr Oostdijk says.

Career prospects

Careers in agriculture rated lower than many other professions among the students surveyed.

Medicine and business were rated highest (by 24 per cent and 19 per cent respectively) in terms of career choice. Seven per cent of respondents expressed interest in a career in agriculture.

Mr Oostdijk says the ***Rabobank Farm Experience Urban Youth Research*** was the first in a number of initiatives Rabobank was undertaking to help address bridging the ‘urban-rural divide. A Farm Experience (FX) program, giving urban teenagers the chance to spend a week on a farm, living with a farming family and learning about life on the land and food production, will be piloted in Australia next month.

“Working with the next generation of Australians, educating and involving them in the agricultural industry is a great place to start,” he says.

The Rabobank Farm Experience is to be piloted in two states, with students from Western Sydney aged between 15 and 18, being hosted in the Western Riverina district in New South Wales, and students from Perth being hosted by farmers in the Geraldton and Narrogin areas in the Western Australian wheatbelt.

Mr Oostdijk says the Rabobank Farm Experience is a direct outcome of work conducted with the bank’s clients to explore ways to positively contribute to the future development of rural communities.

“We are thrilled to be involved in such an exciting initiative, collaboratively with our clients and the high schools, and we hope to see some positive results for everyone.



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The wider impacts of this initiative have the potential to be quite meaningful and transformative.”

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Rabobank Australia & New Zealand is a part of the international Rabobank Group, the world's leading specialist in food and agribusiness banking. Rabobank has more than 110 years' experience providing customised banking and finance solutions to businesses involved in all aspects of food and agribusiness. Rabobank is structured as a cooperative and operates in 42 countries, servicing the needs of approximately 10 million clients worldwide through a network of more than 1600 offices and branches. Rabobank Australia & New Zealand is one of Australasia's leading rural lenders and a significant provider of business and corporate banking and financial services to the region's food and agribusiness sector. The bank has 93 branches throughout Australia and New Zealand.

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