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*Media release
October 17, 2014*

Australian Farm Institute head Mick Keogh takes out prestigious agri leadership prize

Australian Farm Institute (AFI) executive director Mick Keogh has taken out the **2014 Rabobank Leadership Award**, recognised for his outstanding contribution to Australia and New Zealand's food, beverage and agribusiness sectors.

Mr Keogh – the driving force in establishing the AFI, an independent agricultural policy research body, and a key player in Australian agricultural policy debate for more than a decade – was presented with award in front of more than 200 Australian and New Zealand agribusiness industry professionals at the annual Rabobank Leadership Dinner in Sydney last night.

Queensland cattle producer and beef industry advocate Bryce Camm was named the **Rabobank Emerging Leader**, an award category introduced in 2013 recognising up-and-coming young leaders in agribusiness.

Presenting Mr Keogh's award last night, Rabobank Australia chief executive officer Thos Gieskes said, in establishing and leading the national policy and research body, the Australian Farm Institute, Mr Keogh had played a major role in informing policy direction for Australia's vital agricultural industries.

"Mick Keogh is an 'unsung hero' in Australian agriculture," Mr Gieskes said. "He has made an outstanding contribution to the food, beverage and agribusiness sectors through his extensive and long-standing work in agricultural policy over a number of decades.

"While Mick has not himself been directly responsible for the P&L of an individual agribusiness, his work at the forefront of strategic research into public policy issues which impact Australian agriculture and in representing the interests of Australian farmers, has undoubtedly had a far-reaching impact on the prosperity of the sector as a whole."

The peer-nominated Rabobank Leadership Award is presented to individuals who create sustainable growth and prosperity at both a corporate and industry level in agribusiness, while demonstrating a wider commitment to society.

Mr Gieskes said, as a specialist in agricultural banking, Rabobank was in a unique position to see the talent, initiative and effort needed to develop and grow agricultural businesses and the wider sector.

Mr Keogh was raised on his family farm 'Wyola' near Holbrook in southern New South Wales, which has given him as strong connection to the agricultural industry. He is now one of the fourth generation of family members involved in the operation which includes beef, wool and prime lamb, and grains.

Completing tertiary study at a graduate and postgraduate level through the University of NSW, Mr Keogh furthered his knowledge in agricultural science, particularly in wool and



Rabobank

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pastoral sciences. This led him to a career in agribusiness consultancy where he was involved in a range of projects within the sector domestically and in China.

Mr Keogh subsequently spent 10 years with NSW Farmers Association as both deputy CEO and policy director.

In 2004, he became founding executive director of the AFI when it commenced operations. A national agricultural policy and research body organisation, the Institute is independent of government and funded by industry.

Mr Keogh deems his biggest achievement to date as founding the AFI, referring to the process as an “interesting challenge”.

“As a concept, the Australian Farm Institute was completely new,” he said. “It came at a time where there was significant change taking place in agricultural policy and very few dedicated resources existed to really look at the implications of policy and what it means for Australian agriculture and agribusiness companies.”

Mr Keogh said the Institute provided an ideal vehicle to look at policies coming down the pipeline and delve into the implications for industry.

“I think I have always had a fascination with the processes involved in growing, transforming and marketing agricultural products, which make running an agricultural business so incredibly complex. When you add to that the extra layer of complexity arising from policy decisions, agriculture really is an incredibly challenging, but also very rewarding sector to be involved in,” he said.

Mr Keogh said it was “tremendously gratifying” to have some of his work recognised through the Leadership Award.

“We have a fairly small team at the Australian Farm Institute and I would regard this award as recognition of the work of my colleagues and the entire Institute team, including board members and advisory council members, rather than the work of any individual,” Mr Keogh said.

“It’s also very humbling to look at the previous recipients of this award, all of whom are highly respected leaders in agriculture. It’s daunting to be placed in that same group, after having looked up to those people over the years.”

Mr Keogh is “immensely” positive about the future of the Australian agricultural industry and says there are some great opportunities he believes will unfold for the sector.

“It’s a bit cliché but the boom in middle class consumption in Asia is going to without doubt create opportunities for Australian agriculture and agribusiness. It’s not going to be like the past where all we had to do was produce it and it would sell, we are in a much more competitive environment now, but the situation actually suits Australian agriculture,” he said.



Rabobank

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“The emerging middle class consumers increasingly want to know where the product has come from, they want to know that it’s safe and they are focused on the reputation of a product. All of those factors will mean that many Australian products can actually secure a premium in those markets and can compete in markets where success isn’t solely determined by price. We are already seeing that in relation to the dairy industry and to some extent the beef and lamb industries.”

Mr Keogh says the challenge will be to retain that premium reputation and take advantage of it.

“There is real merit in having a single common brand or profile for Australian agricultural products – not to replace private brands, but to actually underpin them” he said.

“I think there is a lot of waste at the moment with different Australian states pushing their own profile and that is unfortunate because when you get to China, for example, there is very little awareness of individual Australian states. There is, however, good recognition of Australia and its reputation for quality and safety, but to build on that we need more national coordination.”

A peer-judged award, previous recipients include food and agri corporate heads John Watson, Max Ould, Nick Burton-Taylor, Robert Hill-Smith and Barry Irvin, leading food scientists Dr Bruce Lee and Dr Jim Peacock, as well as last year’s winner, Sir George Fistonich of Villa Maria Estate.

The Rabobank Leadership Dinner was held at the Harbour View Ballroom, at Taronga Zoo. Keynote speaker was Lino Saputo Junior, chief executive of global dairy company Saputo.

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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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