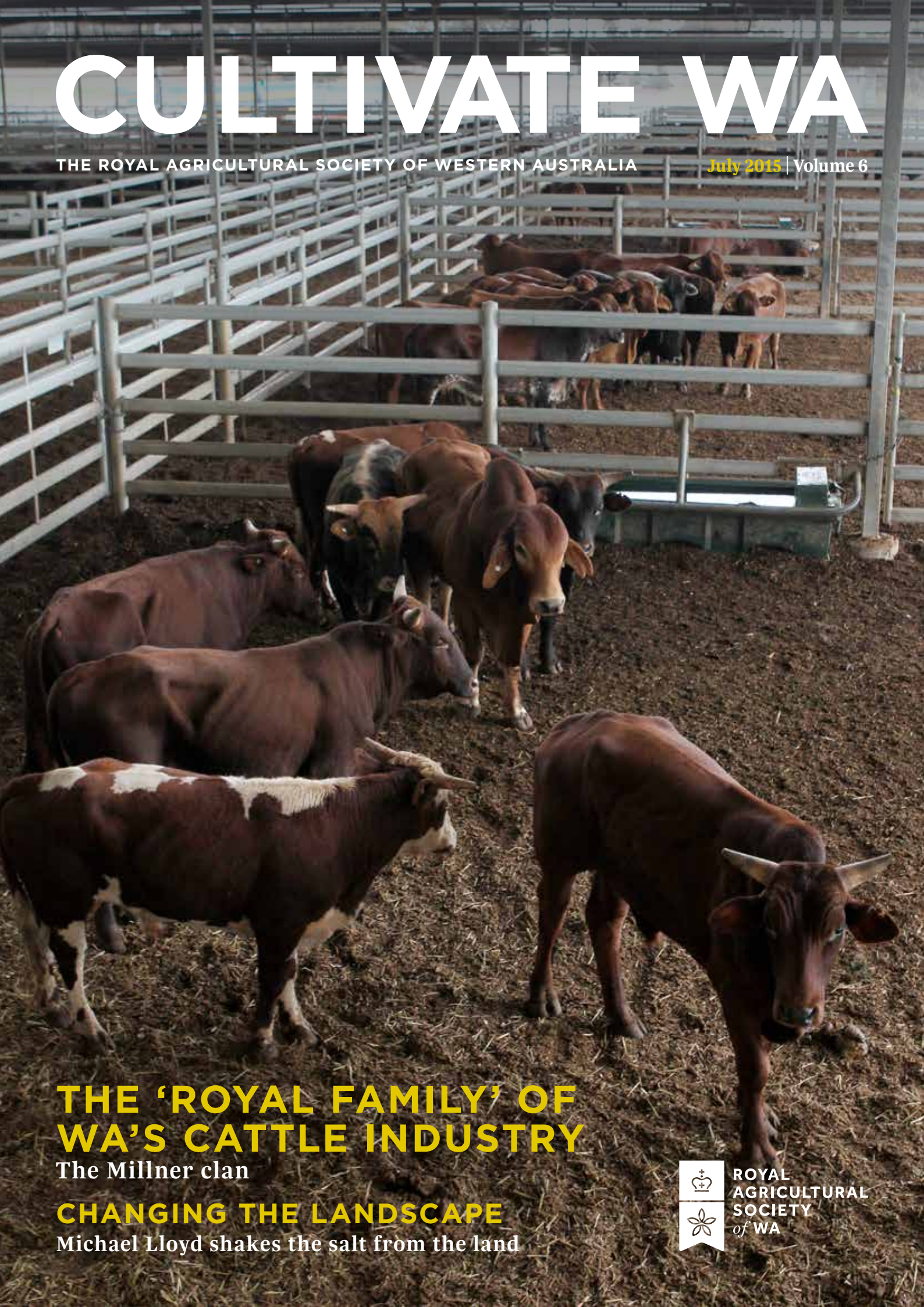


CULTIVATE WA

THE ROYAL AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

July 2015 | Volume 6



THE 'ROYAL FAMILY' OF WA'S CATTLE INDUSTRY

The Millner clan

CHANGING THE LANDSCAPE

Michael Lloyd shakes the salt from the land



ROYAL
AGRICULTURAL
SOCIETY
of WA



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To top job as CEO

EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to the winter edition of Cultivate.

In this issue we are showcasing a number of talented, industry-based people who have, and continue, to contribute to the agricultural world. We are constantly driving the educational aspect of the organisation and we have the latest news regarding the all-important scholarships recently presented, and the continuing expansion and success of our FarmEd school incursions.

Dr Rob Wilson, President
The Royal Agricultural Society of WA

CONTACT US

If you would like information about any of the articles please email us at cultivatewa@raswa.org.au

Publisher: Royal Agricultural Society of WA
Claremont Showground, 1 Graylands Road
Claremont WA 6010 | Telephone: 08 6263 3100



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Activism changed farming landscape

A landcare champion is the newest inductee to the Royal Agricultural Society of WA's Hall of Fame

Michael Lloyd is a renowned expert on salinity whose saltbush based revegetation practices have led to major advances in land management across Australia.

He has been pivotal in changing the perception of saltland from 'white cancer' to economic and environmental asset.

When 40% of his Lake Grace wheat sheep property, Bundilla, fell victim to salinity and waterlogging, Michael Lloyd established saltbush pastures and slowly revegetated 600 hectares of saltland.

It was a stunning success story. Mr Lloyd established a long term sustainable management system that increased production and benefitted biodiversity. His land care practices equipped Bundilla to withstand drought more effectively than many neighbouring farms and to stabilise critical water resources.

The scale of investment in saltbush based saltland pastures at Bundilla was unique in Australia and the farm became a case study for scientists with Mr Lloyd always open to sharing his insights.

"We noticed changes over about 10 or 15 years, bit by bit. We were in denial really. Then when things started to get bad I knew I had to do something. I started looking at it and trying out different things. I knew I was going to have to change this farm around. I started planting saltbush and saw results after about five years," says Mr Lloyd.

Mr Lloyd became an activist for saltbush revegetation after a research paper was published in 1994 indicating that high levels of salt in saltbush meant that it was almost toxic to sheep. That was contrary to his experience. The research was based on feeding trials with saltbush where the sheep had no access to under-storey and it dramatically dampened interest in saltbush and saltland pastures for several years.

"It was a real concern to me that we may bail out of research funding because of the findings of a report that didn't tell the whole story."

According to Michael Lloyd, the key to success of saltbush revegetation was growing saltbush and grass together. "It is the combination of the two that makes the difference."

In 1996, Mr Lloyd met Clive Malcolm, the pioneer of saltbush agronomy, at a conference in Albany. The two became friends and worked together over many years to raise the profile of saltland.

When the State Government released its Salinity Action Plan of 1996 without any reference to saltbush revegetation, Michael Lloyd got busy.

He hosted field days at Bundilla for six or seven years with 50 and 60 people visiting every year: "I raised the profile of saltland. I got a good reception at a State Landcare conference and I spoke at national conferences."

Realising the importance of setting up a farmer based group to lobby agencies, the Saltland Pastures Association was formed in 1997 with Michael Lloyd as its chair. His 1996 paper Saltland Pastures – Saltland Profit helped spark renewed interest in saltbush. Tenacious lobbying paid off with saltland agronomy research put on the policy agenda.

A win came when the use of saline land and water was added to Western Australia's Salinity Action Plan Draft Update in 1998 and then another victory when the goal of re-vegetating one million hectares of saline land over a decade was adopted in the Western Australian Salinity Strategy of 2000. But perhaps the sweetest victory of all was when the wool industry developed a program on resource management with \$8m of the \$20m funding set aside to deal with saltland.

"When things started to get bad I knew I had to do something. I knew I was going to have to change this farm around."

According to RAS President Dr Rob Wilson the work of Michael Lloyd changed landcare management on farms and had driven sustainability. In 2002, Mr Lloyd was awarded the prestigious McKell Medal. He is the 60th inductee to the Agricultural Hall of Fame which was established by the RAS in 1999.

"This recognition means a lot," says Mr Lloyd, "I have looked at the Agricultural Hall of Fame over the years and thought about the people there. I know a lot of them. I am amazed that people consider that I am in the same category."

Michael Lloyd sold Bundilla five years ago and moved to Bayonet Head near Albany. These days he is studying a Bachelor of Arts degree majoring in Anthropology and Sociology, and Indigenous Knowledge, History and Heritage. "I had not done humanities – a lot of science but no arts. I thought anthropology sounded interesting."

While no longer at the forefront of salinity management Michael Lloyd understands there is still much work to do. "We need to find out more about animal reaction to saltland. We need information on different plants. A lot of plants do not work. If we can't do anything with saltland for grazing stock is there anything else we can do?"

Appetite for agriculture

When a high-profile mining leader with deep roots in the pastoral industry buys back the State's biggest and best-known meat processing works from a foreign owner, people take notice

Andrew and Nicola Forrest's Minderoo Group bought Harvey Beef last year, after eight years of foreign ownership, and brought with it a broad mark of confidence for agriculture and food in WA.

The chairman of iron ore miner Fortescue Metals Group, the world's fourth largest iron ore exporter with annual shipments of about 165 million tonnes of ore from its Pilbara mines, likens agriculture's opportunities today to those of mining less than two decades ago.

"I have always been a firm believer and an even stronger supporter of the Australian agricultural industry," Mr Forrest said soon after acquiring the South West beef processing business.

Harvey Beef, which was founded in 1919 and grew to be one of WA's best-known family-owned brands as EG Green and Sons, employs more than 400 people and processes 130,000 cattle a year, drawn from Esperance to the Kimberley. It exports about 60 per cent of its output.

The Minderoo agribusiness footprint extends well beyond its namesake station near Onslow and Harvey Beef, and includes commitments to help rural and regional development through trade, water resources and other initiatives.

Mr Forrest has welcomed the Federal Government's new White Paper on Developing Northern Australia, whose focus includes development of water resources, priority roads and a sustainable workforce to unlock the potential and opportunities of the north.

It aligns with a Minderoo plan to harness the huge potential of northern and trans-Australian underground water resources and increase agricultural production on a major scale.

"I have set my team the aspirational challenge to develop plans to harness at least 5,000 gigalitres of water from these existing basins to irrigate new areas for agricultural production and to drought proof others," he told a national conference earlier this year.



"We're determined to develop opportunities and business activities to help ensure that the Australian agricultural industry's future in China is just as strong as our mining future."

Mr Forrest co-chairs an Australia-China alliance aiming to provide clean, green, safe and sustainable Australian produce to Chinese markets under a single, recognised brand.

The Australia Sino One Hundred Year Agricultural and Food Safety partnership (ASA 100), with representatives from Australia's agricultural sector

and China's agricultural and food distribution companies and consumers, recently added its backing to the expanded use of a 'True Aussie' brand and logo developed by the meat and livestock industries.

"This successful single branding of Australia is vital. For too long we have negatively competed and marketed against each other, State against State or company against company," says Mr Forrest.

"The perception of disaggregation of supply and an innuendo of lack of reliability means that Australia has suffered. If we get this right, Australian agriculture branded products will boom. Let's work together now and get this right."

Mr Forrest says agricultural-based products from WA and other States are among the best quality and safest in the world.

"We must focus on exporting premium, value-added products to capture the growth South East Asian markets," he says.

Minderoo is not the only business with iron ore links investing in agribusiness. A subsidiary of emerging producer Hancock Prospecting, chaired by Gina Rinehart, has invested heavily in the dairy industry in Queensland, with an eye on the Chinese market, and WA. The WA investment involves Sue and Mat Daubney's Bannister Downs Dairy at Northcliffe.

Mr Forrest, who is a member of the RAS, says Minderoo acquired Harvey Beef in the belief that the WA cattle industry had a bright future with the ability to expand its herd.

Harvey Beef is WA's only accredited beef exporter to China and has a wide market in more than 35 countries, ranging from Japan, Korea, Indonesia and Malaysia to the United States and the Middle East.

It is continuing to invest and develop the business to ensure WA has a world-class processor to maximise returns to producers.

"At Minderoo, we're determined to develop opportunities and business activities to help ensure that the Australian agricultural industry's future in China is just as strong as our mining future," Mr Forrest says.

Agriculture and Food Minister Ken Baston says WA needs investment in supply chains to capture opportunities generated by the expected strong growth in demand for quality and safe food in Asia.

"What we're seeing are some great examples of new forms of supply chains, relationships and business models that our agriculture and food sector needs to capitalise on this growing appetite," confirms Mr Baston.

"That investment is indicative of the confidence there is in the future of agriculture here in WA today."

RAS president Dr Rob Wilson agrees the confidence shown through major business decisions conveys a strong, reassuring message about the future of agriculture and food.

"There's still so much potential, so many opportunities and so much excellent work going on to help realise that, starting on our farms and going all the way through to the table," says Dr Wilson.



Opportunities for a new generation

The young men and women who are setting their path to success within the world of agriculture have been earmarked for inclusion in this issue of Cultivate – not least for the determination, skills, motivation and ambition this generation brings to a new and exciting period of industry growth and innovation within the industry

Two young women, intent on leaving their footprints on the agricultural landscape of enterprise, have reaped the benefits of scholarships awarded by the RAS.

The two high achievers - Roxanne Mostert and Emily Jaekel, welcomed the bursaries that will take the 'sting' out of the financial pressures of university life.

The Agricultural Youth Bendat Family Foundation funding presented to Roxanne and leading law firm Kott Gunning's tertiary support awarded to Emily, are part of the RAS Rural Leaders program, which will provide financial assistance to the students for three years of their undergraduate degrees.

Having graduated from the WA College of Agriculture in Denmark, Ms Mostert is one young woman who is not focused on taking over the family's Redmond 400 hectare dairy farm; preferring to carve her own niche. Her intention is to major in agricultural science at the University of Western Australia (UWA). With a special interest in animal feeding and digestion, microbiological soil health as well as sustainable agricultural practices, Ms Mostert is looking to work either as an animal nutritionist or farm consultant.

With her background in farming Ms Mostert says she wants to raise the awareness of agriculture within the local towns and communities.

"Heading into the future I believe the agricultural industry will have to become more sustainable, and management practices will need to be further refined," says an adamant Ms Mostert.

"I enjoy working alongside people and I want to raise awareness of the importance of agriculture. I like to encourage young people who haven't had much of a connection with agriculture to learn more about the industry and the way our food is produced. It is such a basis of everyday life. Friends of mine that grew up in Albany never really had much exposure to the industry but when I pointed out the opportunities there were within the industry and how it all works, they said they never really knew it could be so rewarding, so much fun, or so complex."

The middle sibling of four brothers who she says "keeps me in line, they reckon!" Ms Mostert grew up not just learning

how to milk the herd – a job she really enjoys, but also taking part in the annual three-day WA Youth Cattle Handlers Camp held at Brunswick, (WAYCHC).

It is here students learn all facets of showing beef and dairy cattle to what actually makes a show cow. The camp also is geared towards cattle education from feeding on farm, to getting heifers in to calf and how to tell a good functional beef or dairy cow.

"After attending the camps I spent three years taking part in parading cattle at the Albany Show and, when at college, paraded the cattle at the Royal Show, and also sheep judging," threw in Ms Mostert!

"I had no background in sheep, no experience at all but when I was in year 11 I was shown tips on how to judge sheep and in 2014 I took part in the Meat Breed, Sheep competitions and also Merino judging.

"This year I ended up being one of seven from each State to take part in the Meat Breed, Sheep judging finals at the Sydney Royal Easter Show. I didn't manage to be placed in the top three but it was a really good experience."

She may well have missed out on that achievement but, as a former top achiever, Ms Mostert is also a former recipient of the AglinkEd and Year 11 RAS Agricultural Education Scholarship and named Agricultural Student of the Year at the National 2014 Farmer of the Year Awards in Melbourne.

Ms Jaekel, who graduated from the WA College of Agriculture in Cunderdin last year, is studying a Bachelor of Rural Science online from the University of New England (UNE) in northern NSW.

The decision to study online with the NSW University was made when Ms Jaekel spent a week there after being selected along with 99 other young Australians to participate in Generation 2050, a project to find solutions to feeding the world's population by the middle of the century. It also realised her wish to combine studying with living and working on the family farm.

Ms Jaekel, 18, is the fifth generation of her family to farm 4850 hectares on a

Funding for the future

This is the inaugural year of the Kott Gunning Scholarship and the third year that the RAS has offered the Agricultural Youth Bendat Family Scholarship.

The RAS Rural Leaders program also coordinates year 11 scholarships for students boarding at agricultural colleges in WA as well as the Rural Community Achiever and Rural Ambassador awards that recognise leadership in regional WA. Last year the RAS announced it would establish an Education Foundation with the goal of securing \$1 million for educational scholarships by 2016.

cropping and sheep property at Ongerup, underneath the Stirling Ranges, in the Great Southern region of WA.

Growing up as a child on the farm with two siblings, Emily attended the local school before leaving to board at a high school in Perth.

“I was a boarder from the years 8 to 10, and would go home in the holidays to help on the farm. It was as a boarder I realised I didn’t want to be anywhere except in the country working in agriculture,” recalls Ms Jaekel.

A natural progression was to spend her final schooling years at an agricultural college.

As a student at Cunderdin Agricultural College, Ms Jaekel excelled.

“I became head girl, was on the student council and last year won the ABC Heywire award which gave me the chance to speak to parliamentarians in Canberra about the value of integrating agricultural studies into primary schools.”

With a passion for the industry, Ms Jaekel is vocal as to the lack of agricultural education within the school system.

“I have just been through the education system where it is really lacking in primary and high schools which should be addressed sooner, rather than later,” she says, adamantly.

“The money from the Kott Gunning scholarship will go towards the cost of flights, accommodation and transport during two weeks of uni intensive lab works and practical units in August, within the NSW region.”

In the meantime Emily is intending to expand her skills and learn as much as she possibly can from her time at university and the industry she is looking at, as a career.



The Rural Ambassador competition is sponsored by Rendezvous Hotel and coordinated by the RAS to recognise the contribution of young leaders who work to promote regional development.

WA Rural Ambassador Callum Wesley always hits the ground running... and his foray into the battle for the national title saw him pull out all the stops against tough competition from New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand contenders.

The event, held at the Royal Easter Show in Sydney, saw this young man miss out on the title which was awarded to a NSW Rural Ambassador while the second placing went to the Queensland contestant.

“I thoroughly enjoyed it – the competition in itself without the winning, is character building,” admits Mr Wesley, wryly.

It also, by all accounts, added to his already extensive skill set and was a great place for networking.

“It’s a great avenue for networking – apart from getting to know other rural ambassadors across

the country really well – who I keep in touch with through social media – I was also able to get to know and network with other people within the Agricultural Society at the Sydney Royal Show. Heaps of agricultural people go there so it is certainly a good place to network.

Back on home soil, Mr Wesley is dividing his time between working at his family’s Southern Cross farm and as a specialist consultant for the Department of Agriculture and Food at Merriden.

National Title

When Harvey Agricultural College student Kelly Manning took out the competition from the IGA Perth Royal Show to qualify as the WA contestant for the FCAS National Dairy Paraders’ Championships, she thought she had little chance of actually winning the title.

How far from the truth was she! For Ms Manning, 17, blitzed the opposition from every other state in Australia and New Zealand at the Sydney Royal Easter Show to not only bring home the gold medal, the much-fought for ribbon and the national winner title, but as the youngest competitor.

“I really didn’t expect to win as I knew the competition would be so tough. I was shocked but really happy,” admits this student who lives at her family’s beef farm in Mardella and helps out at a relative’s dairy farm close by.

A young woman with a clear goal, Ms Manning intends to work on a cattle station for a “different experience”, earn an agricultural diploma online and run her own herd stud for commercial cattle.

In the meantime Ms Manning says she will prepare to show dairy cattle from the college as well as the family’s beef cattle at this year’s IGA Perth Royal Show.



RAS program delivers agriculture to schools

Tens of thousands of children in more than 150 primary schools have learned about WA from an agricultural perspective since the RAS introduced the FarmED education program in 2011

This year the learning experience, which is free to schools, is visiting 50 primary schools in the metropolitan area as well as some country locations. The program consists of a theatre piece and student activities with RAS farmers. The play - ‘The Country Life’, aims to raise awareness of where our food comes from, sustainability, the use of technology in farming to maintain and support food production and the different careers available in agriculture.

Music, dance, songs and puppetry are all woven into a kaleidoscope of fun and learning as the energetic and talented young performers, Kris Kingwell, Maria Louise Holland, Thomas Moir and Cassandra Skinner, follow the journey of a city girl, Janet, as she learns about different aspects of farming.

The RAS introduced the FarmED program to counteract research showing children were often unaware as to the origin of food their families buy at supermarkets.

Working within the school curriculum, the RAS has developed resource kits for both pre school and post school visit activities.

According to RAS President Dr Wilson, the RAS recently recruited an agricultural education

specialist to maximise the education value and curriculum content of our programs.

“We are exploring what opportunities exist to get agriculture into the classroom through FarmED and develop new learning experiences at the IGA Perth Royal Show,” says the President.

“We aim to highlight the impact and reach that WA agriculture has worldwide and the opportunities that exist for us to prosper from it and find work in any number of areas within the industry.

Dr Wilson points out that with a skills shortage in the industry it is essential to develop strategies to attract talented young people as we enter an exciting period of growth and innovation.

“The use of satellite navigation, GPS tracking, remote operated machinery combined with efficient and progressive agricultural practices ensures that WA farmers are among the most advanced and productive in the world, says Dr Wilson.

“Food produced in WA is world class. It is clean, green and healthy. It is important children know where our food originates from. This entertaining and lively program teaches children about the significance of agriculture to our lives, our future and our economy.”



Rich past, vibrant future

As the RAS enters the redevelopment of Claremont Showground another milestone marks the progression of the not for profit organisation

The RAS council has approved branding developed by acclaimed WA consultancy Block Branding which will be phased in across all communications over the coming months.

According to President Dr Rob Wilson, the new branding is the culmination of an 18 month project.

“This is a crucial period for the RAS and it is important that our brand resonates with our stakeholders and lifts the profile of the range of activities we undertake,” he says.

“Block Branding has developed branding that captures the essence of the RAS and successfully creates synergy with all our business and community activities.”

In developing the new branding Block was mindful to respect the tradition and heritage of the RAS which has been part of the WA community since 1831.

According to Carolyn Hall, Director Business Strategy at Block, heritage and progression were the visual cues that inspired the branding.

“The flower element in the shape of WA signifies growth, adaptability and vitality while the ribbon banner underscores pride in local produce and industry achievements.

“At the same time a vibrant colour palette with bold typography encapsulates the rich past and vibrant future of the RAS,” says Ms Hall.

Block General Manager, Angela Palandri added: “The opportunity to collaborate with the RAS and be a part of the evolution of such an iconic WA brand, whilst still respecting and acknowledging its significant history, has been incredibly rewarding. We are very proud to be aligned with such an emblematic organisation and brand.”

The big event - GottaGo

Something huge is coming to the 2015 IGA Perth Royal Show. This headline attraction will tower over the Showground and produce more wide eyes than all the white knuckle thrill rides

Dinosaur Adventures is interactive theatre never seen before in Perth and it is set to captivate showgoers with amazing animatronics that will bring to life a prehistoric world. From the ripple of their skin to the glint in their eye, the fibreglass, animated dinosaurs will move, breathe and roar.

The entrance to the exhibit will be a walkway through the giant head of T-Rex into a fully themed prehistoric forest. The massive marquee will feature educational activities where children can be a palaeontologist for the day.

Free entertainment is one of the traditions and highlights of the Show. The RAS is spending close to \$1 million on entertainment. There will be almost 100 hours of entertainment scheduled across the Showground each day.

“Our educational and farm experiences are among the most popular elements of the Show.”

This year monster trucks will be sharing space with monster farm machinery in the Main Arena. WA based Aaron Tuaua, driver and stunt double in the latest Mad Max movie, Fury Road, will unleash a 3.5 metre, 5-tonne metal beast while Queenslander Sam Xuereb vows to match the 265 feet world

record wheelie stand in his Monster Truck, which will stretch that mean machine to 6 metres in the air... Bring it on!

Racing and diving pigs are back by popular demand and every night we expect 25,000 people at the IGA Fireworks Spectacular for what is simply the best choreographed pyrotechnic show in WA.

For the first time the RAS is introducing a bundled ride and food offer for showgoers wanting to plan ahead. Discount tickets are available online and at all IGA stores in the lead up to the event.

According to CEO Peter Cooper, the RAS is listening to what the public wants and constantly refining the offer and experiences at the event.

“Visitor satisfaction levels have risen sharply over the past five years in areas such as value for money and quality and variety of food. At the same time families have given the Show the thumbs up for education,” he says.

“Our educational and farm experiences are among the most popular elements of the Show according to our research.”

This year’s creative campaign will extend the GottaGo call to action that resonated successfully with showgoers last year. The elements of the Show will be captured in GottaSee, GottaFly,

GottaDo and GottaTry experiences, developed by creative agency Gatecrasher.

The RAS is establishing a new food precinct which will showcase the emerging food truck culture in WA. The precinct will sit 400 people and will feature an entertainment hub.

Competitive fervour is all part of the event as \$2 million is invested by the RAS each year to benchmark excellence in agriculture. At the same time a further \$1 million will celebrate the arts, recreational and cultural activities important to West Australians. We are expecting more than 16,000 entries in our competitions and close to \$250,000 in prize money will be awarded.

The highly successful Farm 2 Food and Farmtech exhibits will evolve again in 2015 and a new attraction Discover Dirt will lend support to the International Year of Soils exploring productivity, sustainability, land care and land management. A nature play-scape created by Sabrina Hahn and an urban farm will be highlights of the IGA Follow the Yellow Brick Road trail which offers participants a two hour discovery tour of many agricultural elements of the Show.

President Dr Rob Wilson is adamant education is the cornerstone of what the RAS does. “The RAS has strengthened its Show exhibits, refined the education program that we offer as a community service to WA primary schools and developed strategies to encourage youth to the agricultural society movement and the industry,” he says.

“We expect families will have the time of their lives and walk away not only with showbags and precious memories but a real understanding about how their food is sourced.”

Matriarch leads industry herd

At an age when most women are taking it easy – Lesley Millner is heading two farms, still claiming championships and winning an industry award for the beasts she tends at her Downunder Charolais Stud, in Wooroloo

A woman of resilience, this farmer has led a life full of twists and turns that would make the pages of a book well worth turning!

In her eighth decade Mrs Millner has little intention of slowing down for the years to catch up insisting there is “simply too much to be getting on with.”

Together with her farm manager Crystal Henderson, Mrs Millner’s right-hand person since the death of her husband Rob, earlier this year – the pair work with the 80-head herd of cows and calves, 6 working bulls and 10 young bulls divided between 207.5 hectares.

Bred for meat Charolais serve up bigger prime cuts than

their competitors, returning beefy profits for farmers. Their continuing popularity at breed sales is testament to that.

“The industry is doing very well at the moment with cattle fetching very good prices for slaughter and the livestock sales are good, too. Any stock not sold at the breed sales is sold through the sales yards at Muchea.

“A bull calf has to have a lot of meat on him in the right parts and he has to be quite docile,” states Mrs Millner, who used to be a ‘selector’ but now hands that job over to her side-kick, Crystal.

“Docility is one of the assets of breeding Charolaise. However, there is more to picking a good

bull calf than that – temperament and physique also comes into it – rather like picking a good looking man,” she quips between each exhale of her cigarette.

Mrs Millner’s association with the breed has surpassed 40 years.

“I went with a group of WA farmers to the north island of New Zealand many years ago, along with farmers from other States including Rob who, years later, became my husband,” says Mrs Millner who says her memory is now more suited to remembering details of what has happened in her life, rather than actual dates and times!

The trip prompted her interest in a breed she had originally seen in France. “I thought a Charolais bull would be good to bring to Australia but it was Martin Lenthall, from the Great Southern, a former UK farmer, who introduced the breed to Australia. At that time, I couldn’t afford to import.”

Down the track and married to Rob, who had built a formidable reputation within the cattle industry having been one of the original farmers to also bring in the breed, developed the

Rosedale stud at Blayney in New South Wales before moving to be with his partner Lesley in WA, to set up the Downunder Charolais Stud.

Establishing the Wooroloo enterprise the couple dedicated their time, patience and a great deal of money upgrading the breed to the status it receives these days.

“To get to the stage we are today has taken a lengthy period of time. Originally we had pure bred Charolais bulls using them to increase the pureness from half bred to three-quarter to finally, pure. We introduced the American-born line Charolais to our herd by buying semen and using artificial insemination practices – we prefer that line to the French as these animals are more versatile.”

So good are the Downunder Charolais – not only for the prices they command at the sales – the Millner name has been synonymous within the industry for many years, but their reputation for accolades and interbreed championships is unrivalled.

“We call the Millners’ the Royal Family,” quips David Ellis

Councillor for the WA Charolais Society who has known the husband and wife team since the mid ‘70s. “Their input to the breed has been very important to Western Australia. Both Rob and Lesley were given life membership of the Australian Charolais Society, and the West Australian group.

“Lesley is definitely the matriarch in WA when it comes to this breed of cattle. There is no doubt about that. She was the president for the WA Charolais Society for many years before being on the Federal Council for many years and for most of those years she was the only woman to hold a position on the Council. She is very well respected.”

According to Mr Ellis who also has a Charolais stud, this is one breeder who has never been afraid of paying high prices for eastern states Charolais bulls, in a bid to ensure the best genetics were brought back into WA, including adding genetics from Rosedale and Culham stud stock.

While speaking about her many accomplishments including as a breed judge, claiming interbreed championships from the eastern states, WA country shows as well

as the Perth Royal Show that have never been rivalled, Mr Ellis recounts the tales of Mrs Millner’s ability to deal with the breed including: “castrating many young bulls in one day and then going off out to take part in another side of life she loved – dancing.”

From her neatly manicured and painted nails to the jewellery she wears while working around the farm this is one woman who still exudes a strong will and steely determination.

As a child growing up on a Durack station in the Northern Territory managed by her father Hector, the signs of ‘being her own person’ were pretty evident.

“I grew up learning to muster, taking part in camp drafts, doing all the normal things people do on stations, and went to high school in Alice Springs. It was a life I loved until my parents bought a general store in Wyndham. I didn’t want to be there and wanted a career, so I chose nursing.”

No sooner had she finished her training at Royal Perth hospital than a call saw her move back to take care of her father, who had fallen ill, and to help her mother with the business.



"I drove the trucks, which I shouldn't have done as I didn't have a license but I did it anyway. I was the son my father had lost. My younger brother had died from hookworm when he was six years old."

It was during this time she married her first husband until her parents sold the business and they all moved back to a station on the border of WA and the Northern Territory. Nursing took on a different meaning when she gave birth to two daughters.

When the marriage dissolved this now single mother moved back to the Northern Territory to take a nursing post at a Native Settlement.

Another move back to the station her parents were managing led to a second union before the couple moved to a mixed farm in Toodyay. Three more girls were introduced to the world until 'singledom' beckoned once more and Lesley moved to a unit in the metro area.

When she married Rob Millner, Lesley's life not only took on another direction but also saw tragedy unfold as her youngest daughter at 18 years old, was killed in a road accident.

With an attitude of dealing with whatever life throws at you, Mrs Millner continued to immerse herself into the farm, the stud, competing, sales and the Royal Agricultural Society and the Royal Show.

With a reputation for being an excellent and keen horsewoman Mrs Millner says her first encounter with the Show was:

"Many years ago when my mother looked after my two eldest girls and I partnered with a Policeman friend for the Mounted Police competition."

For more years than she cares to recall, Mrs Millner says she has



been competing successfully at the Show with her cattle, 'bunking there' and intends to carry on with this 'tradition' - "I take a full lane each year - usually about six cows with calves and six bulls."

"I have seen many changes during my years in bringing the cattle to the Show and also, as a member of the RAS Cattle Committee.

"Over the years side shows have taken over where we used to originally show the cattle, and these days we seem to be battling to keep the exercise area for the cattle. Aside from all of that showing is a great way to show off the breed and a place for prospective buyers to come and see what the breed can do, how they perform, and the public can see them too."

"And I always bring a couple of kids from the WA Youth Cattle Handlers Camp held annually at Brunswick, which I am heavily involved with, with me. It is important students learn how to handle cattle and how to clip and dress the cattle for showing."

And it is the life-long support of the Charolais that instigated a United Beef Breeders Association industry award be presented to Mrs Millner at last year's Royal Show in recognition of the long term work in supporting the stud beef industry and development of young cattle people in the industry. An acknowledgement this staunch advocate of the breed happily displays at her home.

According to CEO Peter Cooper the RAS has spent six months successfully navigating the maze of title configurations attached to the land and in the process unearthed a war time error that had been overlooked for 70 years.

"It's been an extraordinary history lesson. Our investigation revealed when, how and why the RAS acquired the parcels of land that today makeup the site.

"During the process of ensuring all our titles were in order we identified a mistake made during World War 2. When we looked at the history of the Showground it did not marry up with the ownership structure in the archives so we reviewed our titles and discovered that seven hectares had been incorrectly titled. When we sorted that out it became clear that the outright RAS ownership of the Showground was far greater than previously understood," Mr Cooper says.

Having achieved clarity around the Showground's complex history and land use titles, the RAS revisited the concept plan and asked the question: how will it be staged and when?

"We have identified 15 stages to the project," affirms Mr Cooper. "Now it's about deciding what we can tackle first."

Ashton Triangle - a parcel of land separate to the main Showground site adjacent to the railway line - is top of the list. "We are undertaking a strategic review of that landholding to identify the best possible development application and timeline," says Mr Cooper.

"It is an opportunity for the RAS to realise some cash for little risk and to provide the funding for further stages of the redevelopment."

Mr Cooper anticipates Ashton Triangle will be redeveloped within the next three years.

"Ashton Triangle is a complex project in itself because there are some title issues to work through at a State and local government level. The RAS owns all but 1300m² which is held as crown grant in trust. We haven't made any decisions as yet. We can sell it, develop it or hold onto it," he says.

Concept plan architects Hames Sharley won a commendation at the 2014 Planning Institute Australia Awards for Planning Excellence WA for the project. Now they have been engaged by the RAS to carry out a review of each of the 15 stages.

"We need to understand the commercial return we would realise from each stage and be sure there is enough market demand for what we have in mind."



Showground staging

One year on from the announcement of an ambitious project to redevelop Claremont Showground a cautious approach is being taken to achieve the right outcome for the RAS and the prime western suburbs landmark which has been home to the Perth Royal Show and other community events since 1904



A rewarding apprenticeship

Carrying off the coveted Governor's Cup at the Perth Royal Show four times in almost as many years has not only been the pinnacle of competing at the event for Quairading's Squiers family, but has been a reflection of years of striving to be the best

And a testament to the farming family they are among the leaders of the field when it comes to producing and showing sheep.

Renowned in the agricultural sector for their top quality Poll Dorset and SAMM (South African Meat Merino) and Merino flocks, the family - father Chris, sons Adrian and Sascha - say they are "trying to breed sheep for the industry."

With 10,000 sheep of which half are Merinos bred for their wool reaping around \$6 and \$9 a kilo, the rest are divided between SAMM and Poll Dorset for commercial and stud purposes.

"We just try to breed the best animals we can," says patriarch Chris. "We don't want second grade sheep." Which is the reason this farmer will never favour a sheep with conformation faults, "especially in the leg area; the hind legs should be the width of the body for good muscling."

Selection of a sheep is, according to eldest son Adrian, 39, usually a 'go and have a look' quest.

"Most of our sheep are selected by eye. Along with the breeding value using Lambplan a bit (a leading genetic evaluation plan for sheep producers developed by the Australian sheep industry, Meat and Livestock Australia and Australian Wool Innovation Ltd), and source other studs in Australia and New Zealand. We look for the commercial side - what the buyers want.

"They are looking for sheep that are quick growing. The Poll Dorsets grow heavier and quicker although some guys prefer the SAMMs for their wool as well as their meat. We try to breed for commercial as well as stud."

Which is why there are up to 700 Poll Dorset stud ewes at any given time and 300 SAMM stud ewes with 1,200 to 1,400 SAMM for commercial purposes.

Above (l-r): Sascha, Chris and Adrian



Using semen from a quality Poll ram, the vet artificially inseminates the Poll ewes.

"We don't use the ram a lot. It is better for the vet to inject either fresh or frozen semen into the uterus - that way we know it is there," states Sascha.

With 85 lambs on the ground out of 10 ewes the Squiers are well ahead. By normal reproductive standards that amount of offspring would take eight years. By using the embryo transfer method, these farmers have accomplished it in one year.

"We try and keep most of the ewes," says Sasha, "as we know they are out of our top ewes."

Rams will be sold as commercial or stud rams. And with the Squiers holding their own annual sale in mid September, there is never any shortage of buyers from all over WA.

"We do keep around a dozen to sell at the Royal Show," verifies Chris who says "we started competing at the Royal in 1972 to 1974 before having a break until the mid '80s and carrying on since then."

He points out they "don't clean up" the awards all the time. "Some years we didn't get anything. We have been lucky these last few years. Winning the Governor's Cup is a pinnacle of the Show for us."

It may also serve as a statement this farming family implements a highly successful management program throughout their 17,500 acres, which includes lease properties, of which 6,500 acres is given over to cropping, as well as cattle and sheep.

With a succession plan in place: "we have a close, working partnership and when I have had enough both sons will take over," says Chris. Then he adds with a wry grin: "Probably when I am six feet under!"

Both Adrian and Sascha, former Cunderin Agricultural College students, now married with young daughters, take nothing for granted.

"They have had to work for the partnership," stresses their father. "If you don't work for it, you don't appreciate it. Farming is an ongoing apprenticeship - I am still learning after 50 years. It keeps changing and you have to keep up with those changes."

And any changes are always thrashed out around the kitchen table. "We are lucky in that we see things in the same way and decisions are made between us. A bad decision would affect all of us. We make the best decisions we can."



"If you don't work for it, you don't appreciate it. Farming is an ongoing apprenticeship - I am still learning after 50 years. It keeps changing and you have to keep up with those changes."

And where the Squiers' breeding program comes into play.

"We select the best breeding ewes and the best ram to hopefully get the best lambs."

Younger brother Sascha, 37, explains embryo transfer was trialled for the first time 25 years ago for their ewes.

"It wasn't too successful for the first couple of years," admits Sascha. "We learned a lot - more by trial and error. There were a lot of variables - the wrong drug dosage, not feeding correctly; animals could be under stress... any number of reasons why. Now we have it down to a fine art, achieving between six and ten at the moment."

A vet will implement the embryo transfer program. Initially the Polls and their receptive 'wombs', the Merinos, will be given drugs to ensure all ewes are in the same stage of their cycle.



Immersed in agriculture

A long working association with the Wesfarmers group, many years on the council of the RAS and a 'cheer leader' for the Royal Show has seen Andrew Williams' involvement within the world of agriculture reach heights he hadn't anticipated



An accountant by profession, the first 15 years of his career were spent implementing financial systems for a number of different enterprises including one that Mr Williams says: "Spat me out when the GFC hit."

"I joined the Wesfarmers Group the same week they bought out Bunnings and spent the next 14 years holding financial, strategic and operational roles within the Group that included dairy, timber, retail, chemical and fertiliser industries," says Mr Williams who admitted to moving away from the accountancy aspect when 'thrown into the deep end' having been asked to take on business development and commercial analysis of the business.

A move to facilities management at Western Power lasted four years until taking over as CEO of the West Australian Meat Industry Authority, (WAMIA) earlier this year, overseeing the Livestock Centre at Muchea which replaced the Midland sale yards.

"Although I am not originally from an agricultural background I have immersed myself within the industry both professionally and personally over many years," says Mr Williams whose initiation into the RAS was due to his daughters Rebecca and Jennifer volunteering in the horse section at the Royal Show from a young age.

"From being the girls' taxi to a marshal and then steward at the Show, the then ringmaster and now vice president of the RAS Paul Carter suggested I might like to consider standing for council."

And the rest, as they say, is history!

"We are actively looking at redeveloping the Showground within a 20-year period with an educational and community focus in mind. Within the next five years there will have been some real changes," assures Mr Williams who went on to say:

"Farmers and the rural community remain a pivotal part of why the RAS exists and gives the opportunity for the showcasing of the agricultural industry.

"Education is a very important and an evolving part of why the RAS exists. It is now more of an educational institution these days; bridging the ever-increasing gap between the country and the city.

"If not the RAS, who else will provide that unbiased education? The organisation has no axe to grind, no commercial barrow to push - it is not political in terms of agriculture and I think it is really important the RAS remains neutral. There are plenty of lobby groups out there - most of which are important and have their place. Our place is not to lobby for any particular part of agriculture. Our role is to help to educate the general public as to where their food comes from," says Mr Williams.

With a firm view that children are the parents of tomorrow, Mr Williams emphasises the significance of the Show and out-of-Show activities the RAS concentrates on.

"We do this through scholarships, a highly successful school incursion program and we are looking at including even more out-of-Show educational processes."

"That opportunity to get close to and understand a little bit about livestock is invaluable. I believe it is really important trying to keep that connection with what is still the second biggest industry in the State. There are a lot of positive factors out there for agriculture and I think agriculture can be the number one industry in WA again."

Three days out of his working week take him out of his corporate office to be on hand with operational duties at the undercover Livestock Centre, built at a cost of \$54.5 million.

The Centre, which occupies 10 of the 303 hectares on the site, will have seen 100,000 head of cattle and more than 500,000 head of sheep pass through its yards last financial year.

"We provide and operate a market place for others to buy and sell animals. Our major clients are livestock agents and we are used like a depot - with private sales, consolidated animal sales and bull and cow sales. We have our fair portion of goats as well.

"On an average auction day we see 15,000 head of sheep and 1,700 head of cattle pass through. My vision for the Centre is that it is as cost effective, efficient as possible and to make the Centre a hub that is easy to transact livestock as possible."

When he is not making his mark at the RAS or the Livestock Centre, Mr Williams can be found in the saddle - on his bike.

An avid cyclist and member of the South Perth Rouleurs Club, Mr Williams took to pedal power several years ago when he cycled to work from his then home in Bibra Lake to his city desk job at Western Power.

"I only bought a bike to get fit and ended up joining the Rouleurs and became involved in competitions. I did my first road race at the Goldfields - the Classic 132 kms Kalgoorlie to Menzies."

On closer questioning Mr Williams, who trains up to six days a week, modestly says his last race saw his final 900 metre sprint to the finishing line averaging 51.6 kms! He has ridden the 145kms, 3-Dams Challenge in under six hours and says his best competitive result has nabbed him a second place. He is now aiming to ride in Europe.

Meet our Councillors



Bill Keane

Perth barrister Bill Keane has advised and represented numerous high profile cases in matters involving complex contractual and corporate issues for leading companies and government agencies including Wesfarmers and the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC).

Coupled with extensive industry knowledge and experience in grain supply chains, rail and port access as well as food industries, it was fitting Mr Keane was elected recently to council by the RAS.

“With 20 years experience in commercial law, I have a keen interest in the legal and commercial issues facing the RAS and I believe I can make a valuable contribution to the governance and strategic direction of the organisation,” says Mr Keane.

“The Showground is one of the State’s great assets, and the RAS’s concept plan offers a great opportunity to preserve its special character, while making the most of its potential to deliver value to the people of WA.”



Bruce Mullan

With a PhD in animal science from the University of Western Australia (UWA), Dr Bruce Mullan spent three years in the UK gaining experience in agricultural issues before moving to Victoria to take up a position as a research scientist with the Department of Agriculture in Werribee.

A move back to his home turf saw Dr Mullan carry out research for the pork industry at the Department of Food and Agriculture WA, (DAFWA) before undertaking consultancy work in Australia and overseas and finally, as a director of DAFWA with a broad range of managerial responsibilities.

Dr Mullan, who holds the Moir Medal for services to WA agricultural research, has held positions on a number of industry committees, boards, as a lecturer at UWA and an associate professor at the University of Melbourne, and contributed to a number of industry publications.



Dudley Elliott

Taxation specialist Dudley Elliott, with 25 years of experience in advising growing businesses on taxation issues, structuring, financing and exit strategies, is taking the role of RAS Treasurer in his stride.

Mr Elliott, a chartered accountant, self-managed super funds auditor and a director of the Indian Ocean Group of Companies holds a Master of Law (Taxation) and a Bachelor of Business from Curtin University.

A former banker, Mr Elliott made the switch to public accounting almost three decades ago when he joined the international audit, tax and advisory firm BDO Nelson Parkhill. Following the merger between BDO and Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu in 1994, Mr Elliott became a partner.

Mr Elliott left Deloitte in 2007 to establish his own advisory practice which operates under the name of Indian Ocean Group with a staff of 20.

Champions hit high notes

RASWA Brass, the 25 piece brass ensemble that has wooed local audiences for more than 50 years, easily retained its title of A Grade Brass Champion of WA at the recent State Band Championships for the 36th year in a row. Not a bad effort!

The band’s outstanding performance of the test piece, *Breath of Souls*, by Paul Lovatt-Cooper delivered 95 points out of a possible 100. Not stopping there, RASWA Brass also took the overall brass entertainment award while euphonium player, Justin Freeman, won the WA Solo Champion of Champions prize.

The RAS has been a long time supporter of the brass band. The beautiful music created by WA’s top performers is a welcome sound each year at the IGA Perth Royal Show and for those who are working at Claremont Showground there is the luxury of hearing the band practise at the Ellie Eaton Theatre.

In the past few months RASWA Brass has performed at a number of high profile events. On ANZAC day band members participated in the Perth City Anzac Day Parade marching the route twice.

According to Stu Bennion, President of RASWA Brass, a long held desire was fulfilled by the band when it was joined by the University of Western Australia Choral Society and organist Dominic Perrisnotto to perform the WA premiere of *The Armed Man* by Welsh composer Karl Jenkins in the beautiful setting of Winthrop Hall on 3 May.

“The Armed Man is subtitled ‘a mass for peace’ and is one of the most performed musical compositions by a living composer. It has been performed almost one thousand times since its inaugural performance in 2000,” says Mr Bennion.

“The piece weaves together an eclectic collection of sources into a traditional mass and draws inspiration from a range of material, including religious texts and poetry. It is a tale of war that ends in a promise of peace. We were delighted to join forces with Chris Van Tuinen and the UWA Choral Society.”

RASWA Brass will be performing every day at the 2015 IGA Perth Royal Show.





Claremont Showground PO Box 135 Claremont WA 6910
T 08 6263 3100 | F 08 6263 3171
www.raswa.org.au | www.perthroyalshow.com.au