



AFAM ITAB
Agriculture, Food
& Animal Management

Season's Greetings

November/December 2025

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Our thoughts go out to everyone affected by the recent bushfires across New South Wales. We understand the immediate hardships these events bring and the long road to recovery for families, businesses, and communities. Access to timely support is essential, and the NSW Government has outlined grants, payments, and financial assistance to help those impacted. [Find detailed information and apply for support.](#)

Planning for future challenges is just as important as recovery. The improved [myStockPlanner tool](#) offers NSW agricultural producers a practical way to safeguard their livelihoods during climatic variations. This platform supports informed decision-making and contingency planning, helping farmers prepare, respond and recover from natural disasters. [Learn more about this initiative.](#)

AFAM would like to say a huge thank you to everyone who volunteered their time to provide advice and information about skills needs, industry challenges and workforce development opportunities throughout the year. Your contributions are instrumental to shaping AFAM's initiatives and consultations.

We would like to wish you and your family a safe and happy festive season and look forward to working with you in the new year. Please note that the AFAM office will be closed from 15 December 2025 through to 5 January 2026.

Best wishes,
Ben
Executive Officer

Industry Training Priority Report 2025 published on
AFAM webpage

The Industry Training Priority Report 2025 is now live and available for download on the [AFAM webpage](#).

Developed as part of the NSW Skills Plan and in preparation for implementing recommendations from the recent NSW VET review, Training Services NSW engaged AFAM to produce this comprehensive industry skills report.

Working closely with stakeholders, AFAM gathered insights on current and emerging skills needs, identified industry challenges, and explored opportunities for growth. The report was reviewed by the four Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs) prior to submission, ensuring it reflects broad industry input.

Stakeholders are encouraged to read the report, which will guide the ongoing work of the Industry Training Advisory Body (ITAB). AFAM will continue to update skills priorities, and your feedback is welcome at any time - it will be shared with Training Services NSW to inform future planning.

[Download the report](#) and help shape the future of industry skills development.

Engagement activities

AFAM ITAB and Skills Insight's Stakeholder Engagement Manager Brendan White recently visited Bollandolla Farm in Valla on the Mid North Coast to explore opportunities for workforce development and training. The farm plans to operate as an Indigenous nursery and First Nations social enterprise, with a strong focus on self-determination in product development and a minimal maintenance production system.

Discussions during the visit centred on creating pathways for local employment and training. Plans include developing traineeships delivered by a qualified First Nations trainer and investigating access to the AgSkilled program.

The farm is currently constructing a propagation shed, and partnerships with organisations are being considered to strengthen training and employment outcomes. These initiatives aim to provide sustainable workforce solutions while supporting cultural and community priorities.



L-R: ShoreTrack CEO Jill Ashley, AFAM ITAB Executive Officer Ben Holmes, Skills Insight Stakeholder Engagement Manager Brendan White, Manager Jaanyмили Bawrrungga Aboriginal Corporation Penny Stadhams, NSW TAFE Gumbaynggirr Language Teacher, Ricky Buchanan, Director Bularri Muurlay Nyanggan Aboriginal Corporation Kristy Swain.

AFAM recently attended the Charles Sturt University Digital Agrifoods Summit in November, joining industry leaders to discuss workforce training and skills priorities critical to the future of agriculture. These conversations reinforced actions aligned with the NSW Industry Training Priorities report, including:

- harnessing AgTech data for smarter, evidence-based decision-making
- adopting regenerative and sustainable farming practices to support climate-safe agriculture and achieve NetZero targets
- upskilling existing workers to manage new technologies and systems
- meeting the training needs of new entrants to improve productivity and workplace safety.

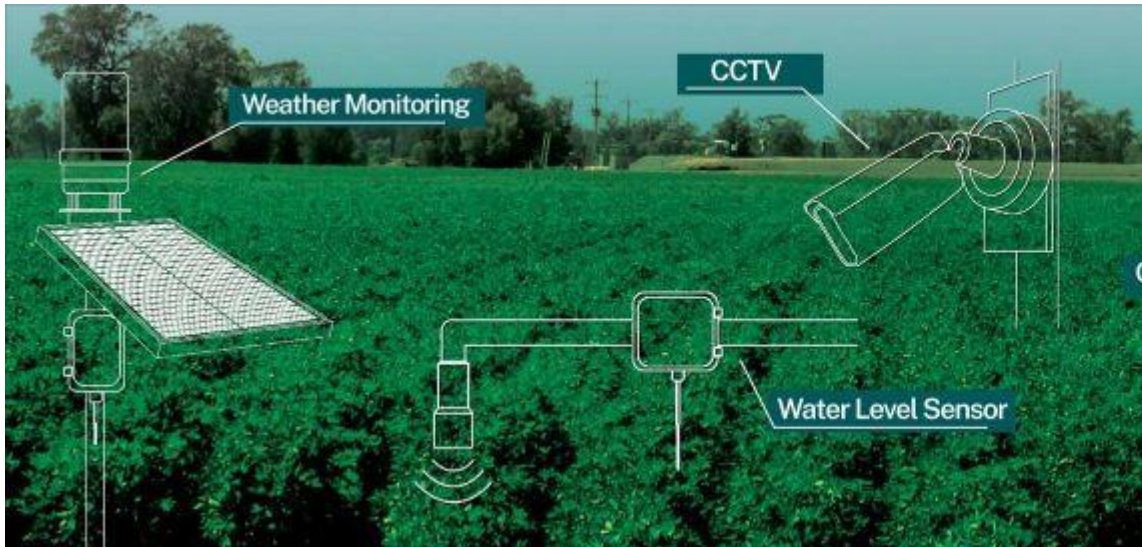
The summit highlighted the importance of preparing the workforce for rapid technological change while maintaining sustainability goals.

A key feature of the event was the spotlight on the NSW Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development's Farms of the Future (FOTF) program. This initiative is helping producers embrace emerging technologies through:

- hands-on workshops and events tailored to practical application
- demonstration hubs showcasing real-world AgTech solutions
- expert advice and resources to support climate-smart farming practices.

FOTF is more than a program - it's a gateway to future-proofing agriculture. By engaging with these opportunities, producers can stay ahead of industry trends, improve efficiency, and contribute to a sustainable, tech-enabled future.

[Explore FOTF workshops and resources.](#)



AgSkilled updates

The Riverina Regional Training Services team, in partnership with AgSkilled, recently facilitated a series of meetings with AFAM ITAB and key stakeholders as part of the NSW Skills Plan – Planning for Local Skills. These discussions focused on shaping a regional planning pilot in the Riverina, which is being developed as a transferable model for other regions across NSW in 2026.

A highlight of this initiative was a collaborative visit to Ladysmith Dairy Farms, where conversations with the Australian Fresh Milk Holdings team identified opportunities to leverage the AgSkilled program to meet workforce priority training needs.

Wool Harvesting Skillset for 2026

AgSkilled, together with Australian Wool Innovation (AWI), Australian Agricultural Training (AAT) Company, and Training Services Regional Office (Orange), explored the development of a short course for the [AHCSS00192 Wool Harvesting Industry Skillset](#). This collaboration aims to deliver place-based training solutions for rural and remote communities, addressing critical industry needs.

Planning is underway for 2026 courses to run across:

- Conargo (Riverina) – Late February
- Cooma (Snowy/Monaro) – May
- Ivanhoe (Far West) – Late May

Digital Agronomy Skillset added

Following discussions in the Riverina with NSW Wine, AgSkilled has endorsed the [AHCSS00106 Digital Agronomy Skillset](#) to address emerging digital capacity needs across AFAM stakeholder industries. This addition reflects the growing importance of technology in agriculture and supports workforce readiness for future challenges.



Alli Dowd from Australian Fresh Milk Holdings, Sonia Stevenson from AgSkilled NSW Training Services and AFAM's Ben Holmes.

Animal care and management careers pathway initiative

AFAM recently visited Tweed River High School's Vocational Education and Training (VET) Hub with Dr Emma Davis from the Australian Veterinary Association (NSW) to promote career pathways in Animal Care and Management. Dr Davis shared insights on biosecurity, animal health and welfare, and occupations such as veterinary nursing. Students engaged in discussions about the diverse roles available in this sector and the skills required to succeed.

Many students are unaware of opportunities in high-demand occupations such as veterinary practice, farriery, pet grooming, and wildlife care. Introducing these pathways early, alongside practical learning can support best practice career immersion programs. Thanks to Tweed River High School for welcoming us and to the students who participated on the day.



L: Tweed River students with Primary Industries Teacher Madison Peacock (front row in yellow shirt), Dr Emma Davis from the Australian Veterinary Association (NSW) (front left) and Ben from AFAM (green shirt). R: Learning with the school goat.

AFAM and Dr Emma Davis also toured Kingscliff TAFE, which has invested in infrastructure and resources to deliver qualifications from Certificate II in Animal Care Services through to Certificate IV in Veterinary Nursing. Several faculty areas have been improved, and the facility now offers strengthened course delivery in Veterinary Nursing and Animal Care Services, with three short-course Dog Grooming skill sets planned for 2026. These programs provide practical and theoretical education opportunities for learners and can be tailored to improve access.

[Explore the Animal Care Training Package.](#)

AFAM looks forward to continuing discussions with schools and training providers to expand curriculum options and support students in building rewarding careers in animal care and management.



Ben Holmes, TAFE NSW Head Teacher Animal Care and Management Amber Newman and Dr Emma Davis from the Australian Veterinary Association during the Kingscliff TAFE visit.

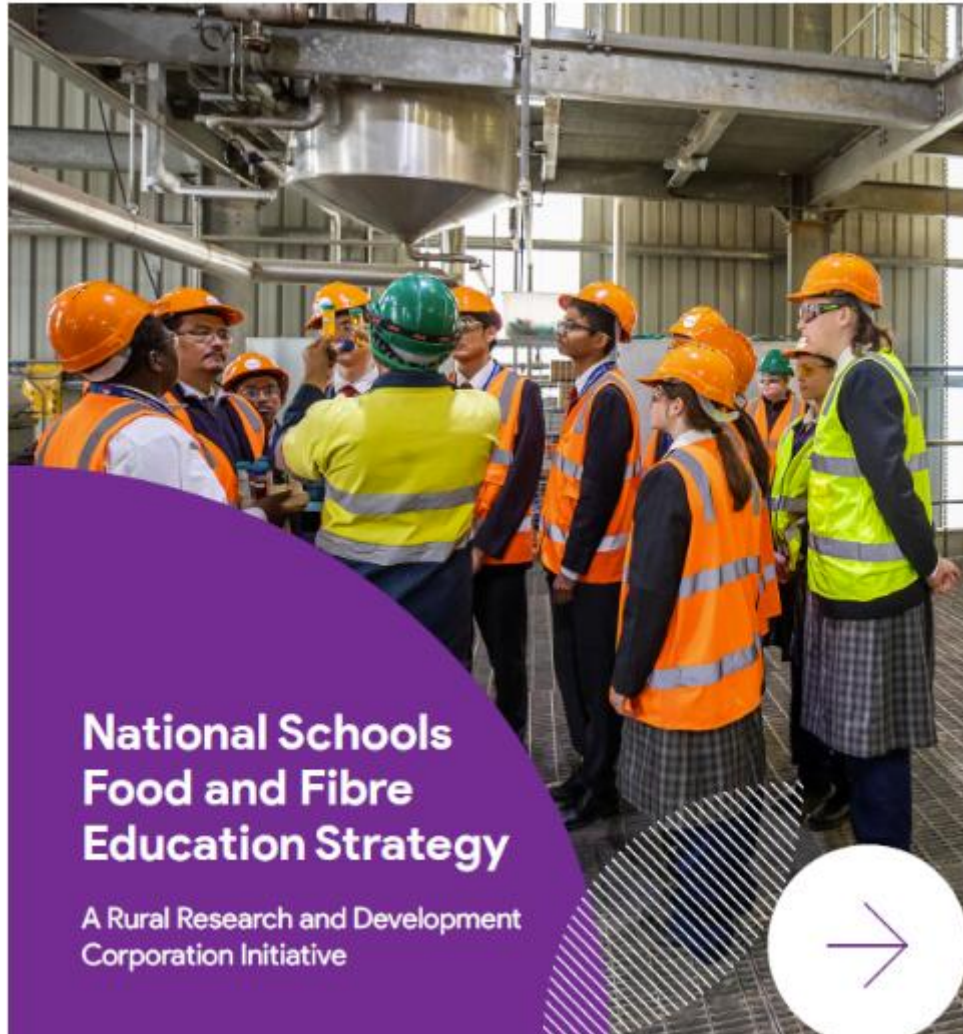
National food and fibre education strategy released

The National Schools Food and Fibre Education Strategy has been launched, setting a clear vision for the future of food and fibre education in Australia. Supported by all 15 Rural Research and Development Corporations, the strategy outlines a staged approach for implementation with a strong focus on collaboration across education, industry and government.

Developed using feedback from more than 900 stakeholders, the strategy reflects diverse perspectives and aims to strengthen connections between schools and industry to improve training pathways and attract future workers. AFAM contributed feedback to the Strategy based on insights from Industry Training Advisory Committee meetings, reinforcing the importance of these partnerships.

The Strategy is now available online, providing a roadmap to equip students with the knowledge and skills needed for meaningful careers in agriculture and related sectors.

[Explore the full strategy.](#)



Smart and Skilled updates

Financial Cap Review – Adjustments for Continuing Students

The NSW Department of Education has finalised a review of financial caps for Smart and Skilled providers following the 2024–25 activity period. Contract variations will be offered to 194 providers to adjust caps for continuing students, with no further reviews planned at this stage. Providers are encouraged to manage allocations carefully and return any unused caps to the department.

Read more in the [Smart and Skilled update](#).

Trade Pathways for Experienced Workers (TPEW)

The TPEW program offers experienced workers a Recognition of Prior Learning pathway to trade qualifications in the building and construction sector, with funding available for up to 600 learners through 2027. Approved qualifications include Certificate III in Landscape Construction (AHC30921).

Read more in the [Smart and Skilled update](#).

Have Your Say on Performance-Based Contracting

Smart and Skilled is transitioning to a new performance-based contracting model to improve clarity and support quality outcomes for students. Providers are invited to complete a short survey to share experiences and help shape the transitional model. Your feedback will guide future engagement activities and inform upcoming reforms.

If your organisation has not received an email requesting you to complete the survey or if you have further questions, please contact your Regional Provider Support Manager.

Read more in the [Smart and Skilled update](#).

TAFE NSW to Exit Contestable Funding Market

The NSW Government has confirmed that TAFE NSW will be removed from the Smart and Skilled contestable funding market from Semester 1, 2026. This change follows recommendations from the NSW Vocational Education and Training Review and aims to strengthen system stewardship. TAFE NSW will continue to align with Smart and Skilled settings, including the NSW Skills List and student eligibility requirements. Independent providers remain vital to delivering training across NSW and will continue to receive support under current contracts for the 2025–26 period.

[Download the Smart and Skilled update](#).

Play your part in strengthening the VET workforce

As part of a collaboration between all 10 Jobs and Skills Councils to strengthen Australia's VET workforce, Skills Insight's VET Workforce Project is developing co-designed strategies to boost attraction and retention for both VET and industry workforce in rural, regional, and remote areas.

Registrations are now open for roundtable and networking events across the country, as well as online. NSW sessions include:

- Riverina - Tuesday 17 February
- Tamworth - Thursday 19 February
- Dubbo - Wednesday 25 February

These interactive sessions will capture stakeholder insights to shape a Workforce Development Framework that employers and RTOs can use in collaboration to grow and sustain the VET workforce in their region.

Register for an event and explore more about these important initiatives on the [project webpage](#).

TAFE NSW funding certainty

The NSW Government has announced plans to provide a predictable, long-term budget for TAFE NSW to enable focus on delivering high-quality education and training for students across the state. This funding certainty aims to reduce administrative red tape for teachers, giving them more time to develop courses and support learners.

The decision reinforces TAFE NSW's role as the public provider of vocational education and training for communities across New South Wales, as outlined in the NSW Skills Plan and the National Skills Agreement. Independent, industry and community training providers will continue to play an important part in meeting the state's skills needs.

This commitment delivers on the NSW Vocational Education and Training Review recommendation and supports the Minns Labor Government's plan to build a strong and stable TAFE NSW. The 2025–26 Budget includes a record \$3.4 billion investment in Skills and TAFE.

[Learn more](#).

NSW shearer Carol Mudford named 2025 national winner

Carol Mudford from NSW/ACT, founder of sHedway, has been announced as the 2025 AgriFutures Rural Women's Award National Winner for her outstanding leadership in suicide prevention and mental health support within the shearing industry.

This year's event marked 25 years of the AgriFutures Rural Women's Award. Since its inception, the program has recognized hundreds of women driving transformation in rural industries, businesses, and communities.

Learn more about [Carol Mudford's achievement](#) and [explore the award's 25-year legacy](#).



AgriFutures Rural Women's Award winner Carol Mudford (R) with runner up Isabella Thrupp (L).

Fresh Start Program creates career pathways across NSW

Councils across New South Wales are embracing the Fresh Start Program, a \$252.2 million investment by the Labor Government that aims to support an additional 1,300 apprentices, trainees, and cadets over the next six years. In its first 12 months, councils have seized the opportunity to bring more young people into their communities, reversing the trend of outsourcing jobs to external contractors. This initiative seeks to establish reliable career pathways and ensure more services are delivered in-house.

Recruitment has focused on roles that meet local needs and address skills shortages. Of the new recruits, 21 percent are from Agriculture, Food and Animal Management sectors, including 18 Sports Turf Trade Workers and 39 Gardeners. These positions strengthen council capacity while providing practical training opportunities for young people.

[Learn more about the program and its impact.](#)

JSA Occupation Shortage List stakeholder survey

Jobs and Skills Australia is inviting stakeholders to participate in the 2026 Occupation Shortage List (OSL) Survey. This is your chance to share insights on labour market trends and help ensure the accuracy and relevance of the upcoming OSL.

The **survey will open on Tuesday, 20 January 2026**, and close on Wednesday, 18

March 2026. If you would like to be added to the invitation list, please email OccupationShortageList@jobsandskills.gov.au.

We encourage you to share this opportunity with your networks. Greater participation means richer insights and stronger reporting. Your feedback will play a vital role in shaping workforce planning for the year ahead.

Jobs and Skills Councils (JSC) project updates

Manufacturing Industry Skills Alliance (MISA) JSC is preparing projects for 2026, with further details to be shared in the New Year. One of their key initiatives for 2025 has been the Make It Manufacturing pilot project, which aims to increase awareness of careers in the manufacturing sector. This activity resulted in 256,000 clicks to the dedicated website <https://www.makeitmanufacturing.com.au>, which provides information on technology in modern manufacturing, career opportunities and resources for parents, teachers and young people. You are encouraged to visit the site and share it with your networks.

Skills Insight JSC recently launched their [Workforce Plan 2025-2026](#) and data dashboard. The [data dashboard](#) brings together workforce, occupation, and training data to provide an overview of 13 industry groups. It highlights demographics, employment trends, top employing occupations, and VET activity. Industry-specific webpages are in development and will be available in the coming months.

Skills Insight currently has training package and research projects underway in various stages. To learn more and provide input please follow the links below.

Development Stage:

- [Community-based Aquaculture Training Tools](#)
- [Rural Operations](#) (project recommencement in planning)
- [Veterinary Nursing Skills and Qualification Review](#)

Broad Consultation:

- [Attraction and Retention Guidance](#)
- [Career Pathways for Agricultural Trades](#)
- [Flock Safe Project](#)
- [Mapping Licensing and Regulatory Considerations](#)
- [Vet Workforce Project](#)

Finalisation:

- [Concept for an Ag Trade Apprenticeship](#)
- [Essential Meat Processing Skills](#)
- [Worker Safety Induction Pilot](#)



NSW grants, opportunities & scholarships

The following grants, opportunities and scholarships are available to employers and vocational learners. Follow the links for more information.

[2026 Hay Inc Rural Education Program](#): An opportunity for young people to gain new agricultural skills, education and experience in industry.

[Barranggirra](#): to provide end to end support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners through culturally appropriate mentoring to ensure successful retention and completion of training and improved post-training employment outcomes.

[Boarding scholarships for isolated students](#): assists eligible students from rural areas who are required to board to attend NSW public specialist high schools – including agricultural boarding schools.

[Continuing Apprentices and Trainees Placement Service \(CAPS\)](#): CAPS helps apprentices and trainees find jobs or continue with their qualification when their training contract ends before completion.

[Employers funding and support](#): learn about government incentives and supports to employ and train apprentices and trainees.

[Fee-Free training for agriculture, forestry and fishing](#): giving broad access to government-subsidised training and high-level courses in targeted priority areas.

[Foundation for Rural Regional Renewal](#): Strengthening Rural communities – Small and Vital Program: gives small remote, rural and regional communities the opportunity to access funds for a broad range of initiatives that directly and clearly benefit local communities including education and training. There are two tiers of Small & Vital funding available. **Current applications close 4 December 2025.**

[Free Workshops](#): Supervising your apprentice or trainee: free workshops for employers and supervisors of apprentices or trainees in the workplace held across NSW.

[Living Away From Home Allowance for Apprentices](#): an allowance is available to eligible full and part-time apprentices and school-based apprentices during the first 3 years of training who need to move away from home in order to start or remain in an apprenticeship.

[OCHRE Opportunity Hubs](#): aim to provide First Nations young people with the confidence and knowledge to follow a supported pathway between school and further education and/or employment through partnerships with schools, coordination of local opportunities, mentoring, support and more.

[Resources to Assist in Supervising Your Apprentice or Trainee](#): a series of videos and resources are available.

[Women in trades](#): Resources available to attract women into trades for industry and educators.

Find information about these and all available grants and funding opportunities on the [NSW Government website](#).

Please feel welcome share this newsletter with anyone you think might be interested.

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AFAM NSW ITAB

bholmes@skillsinsight.com.au

PO Box 7133, East Ballina, NSW 2478

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