

10
Questions with

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1. Archibull Prize entry *Miss Sophie* by Matraville High School 2 & 3. Shoalhaven High School's winning Archibull Prize entry *Udder Brilliance*
4. Archibull Prize runner-up last year Trangie Central School with *John Bull*. Photography Toby Peet

What do you get when you give a group of primary and secondary school students a blank life-sized fibreglass cow to create a masterpiece showcasing primary industries? Well... it could just be an Archibull Prize winner, as **Rosie O'Keeffe** discovers.

The Archibull Prize is just one of the contemporary, engaging, fun programs created as part of Art4Agriculture. Lynne, tell me what the main goals of Art4Agriculture are.

A passion to link consumers with producers to promote public understanding of farming, and the interconnectedness of health and nutrition and the agricultural sector is the driving force behind Art4Agriculture. Art4Agriculture celebrates the people and places behind the food and fibre that keep us alive.

I saw the next generation of consumers and decision makers as the ideal demographic to build a two-way partnership with and devised a suite of programs under the banner of Art4Agriculture that would tap into the creative bright young minds in our schools. Eight years after its inception, the Art4Agriculture team and our funding partners including Australian Wool Innovation (AWI), Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC), Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA), Cotton Australia, NSW Farmers' and Parmalat Australia Ltd, design events and activities that focus on youth, career opportunities, the community, and the arts, and link all of these back to agriculture.

Tell us about the history of Art4Agriculture and main influences for the concept.

With farmers less than 1 per cent of the Australian population and modern supply chains increasingly isolating them from their customers, I thought it was highly likely that all those people further up the supply chain farmers relied upon to share their messages with customers, had as little knowledge about modern farming practices as the community did. This really concerned me as realistically in today's consumer driven society how farmers engage beyond the farm gate is just as important as what they do on their farms.

It all began with Picasso Cows. This was a dairy industry focused project that asked the students to paint life-size fibreglass cows in themes of healthy landscapes, clean water and energy efficiency. After I successfully trialled the program for two years Dairy Australia was keen to take it over.

When they decided to make the program more about the product and less about the farmers I was very disappointed (as were the farmers). Recognising all industries share common ground I was keen to work cross-industry and came up with the idea of the Archibull Prize which uses the original Picasso Cows as a model and also sees Young Farming Champions working with the students.

Can you explain more about the Art4Agriculture programs?

The programs created by Art4Agriculture involve activities that are full of hope for a sustainable future and are tailored to encourage young people to consider agricultural careers. They transcend agricultural education programs by using a range of relevant media and messages.

Our signature programs are the Archibull Prize and Young Farming Champions.

The Archibull Prize uses art and multimedia to tap into a demographic in schools agriculture normally wouldn't reach. Once we get the art teachers excited about the program they then form a partnership with teachers who teach other subjects which means students studying English, science, information technology and agriculture pair up with each other in the school's quest to win the Archibull Prize.

The program is not just for Young Picassos, the students also have to complete multimedia tasks such as writing a blog about their journey and another web-based tool such as a video.

The school is allocated a food or fibre industry and currently the industries studied are wool, sheep and cattle, cotton, grains and dairy.

Each school is also given access to a Young Farming Champion whose area of expertise is the school's food or fibre industry and the school then paints their life-size fibreglass cow using their industry, their young farmer, and the theme of sustainability as their inspiration.

The Young Farming Champions program sees young farmers partner with the next generation of consumers using social media, video and face-to-face initiatives to follow the progress of students participating in the Archibull Prize. Most of the Young Farming Champions are not that much older than the students they are presenting to. They are proud to farm and be part of the agriculture sector and they are proud of the industry they represent.

Tell us more about your own passion for agriculture – your family has been farming in Australia for 180 years, but you actually began a career as a pharmacist... Can you tell us more about the progression into agriculture?

I grew up on a farm but never saw myself as a farmer or being involved in agriculture. My husband was a bricklayer and was also from a long line of farmers. He had an opportunity to share farm, but I must admit I wasn't keen as I felt farmers and what they produce was much undervalued in this country and hence farming did not provide a fair return on the physical, emotional and financial investment required.

What I discovered about agriculture is that I'm really excited by the level of innovation and the technology, and I'm excited by young people in agriculture. There's this perception that young people don't want to farm or work in agriculture and that's not true. I believe it is important that we encourage our young people to have off-farm careers at all levels and leave the door open for them to return to the farm if they want to.

Farming today is complex. It's big business and it should be treated as big business.

We want family boards that have accountants, lawyers, fitters and turners, we need skills sets in farming businesses, and it's really important that my generation is open to that.

It's also important that we communicate that you don't have to own the farm to farm the farm.

The cross industry programs like the Climate Champions program and boards like the Australian Landcare Council I have been involved with have allowed me to sit with politicians, Aboriginal elders, farmers, researchers and to have informed and meaningful conversations I can then share with my sector.

Why do you feel it is important to reconnect the consumers with the farmers who are producing their food/fibre?

There is no denying people are disconnected from where their food comes from... this doesn't mean they don't care, it just means unlike our farmers they may not have had that unique opportunity of growing up on a farm or working in the farming sector and the wonderful experiences, knowledge and opportunities that provides.

A growing number of people in the community do care how their food is produced and they are increasingly concerned about modern farming practices. They are concerned about intensification and the cutting edge science that provides farmers with access to GM technology.

They are however unaware that the amount of land we can grow crops on in the world is shrinking every day. For example our 2014 Archibull Prize entry survey showed us that only 4 per cent of students and 12 per cent of teachers knew that less than 6 per cent of Australia is suitable for growing crops and only 17 per cent of teachers and students knew that 93 per cent of the food we consume in Australia is produced by Australian farmers.

When they know these things they then understand why farmers need to intensify their businesses to grow more from less and to tap into the latest science and technology. They learn that farming is not all mud and flies. They get exposed and excited and inspired about careers of not only farmers but all the people in the agrifood sector who support Australian farmers.

Obviously there have been some very creative entries in the Archibull Prize, are you amazed at the calibre of the sculptures?

What I love about the program is that small schools like Trangie Central School with 64 students can compete on equal footing with students from the top selective schools in the city like James Ruse Agricultural High School.



There were a few standouts last year including Shoalhaven High School with *Udder Brilliance* sending a detailed message about the importance of natural resource management, increasing use of technology and mechanisation in the dairy industry. Each leg tells its own story highlighting the importance of natural watering on the farm and the supermarket price wars on milk is represented on her udder. Trangie Central School created *John Bull* which takes on the concept of technology and machinery in the cotton industry. *Wool I Am* is a super cow fully equipped with a cape made from knitted patchwork squares. Model Farms High School has broken it into three pieces allowing different areas of the wool industry to be showcased.

The entries are certainly world class and they get more innovative each year and that's what we're trying to achieve with the program by tapping into really creative kids.



Young Farming Champions with Art4Agriculture National Program Director Lynne Strong

This year we've taken it more so to rural Australia because we were inundated with requests from rural communities and we thought it was a great way of engaging them with something fun and exciting. However there is a cost to taking it to rural Australia – it can be thousands of dollars just to transport a cow. We've had phenomenal support from businesses and transport companies throughout NSW and Queensland though, and at Cowra the local butcher was the drop-off point and he put the blank Archibulls on display in his front window. It's through this support we've really been able to involve rural communities this year.

How many people have the programs reached?

Art4Agriculture has trained 40 Young Farming Champions and reached 20,000 students, their teachers, families and friends across NSW, Queensland and Victoria.

Do you believe it's an exciting time to be involved in agriculture?

I believe so, but it's tough out there in agriculture. Whilst I think many farmers and industry bodies believe climate change and global warming or international competitiveness and government policy are the biggest challenges facing the industry, I feel it is consumer images and perceptions and lack of understanding of modern farming practices that are the biggest threat going forward. I'm excited that we can get such a huge response from communities for projects like the Archibull Prize and the Young Farming Champions and I am particularly inspired by the way they step-up to be the face of their industries.

Farmers have traditionally been quiet achievers and don't always want to talk about themselves and their farms but in today's consumer driven market place we can't afford to hide behind the bushel anymore.

The young people in our programs realise how important that is and they are keen to learn and share their learnings with their peers.

What future guidance is there for participants of the program?

We provide agriculture's young people with the skills and experience and confidence to be able to share their stories about agriculture which can then be used in a range of forums throughout their life. We continually find opportunities for young people to use their skills, build their networks and create careers. We also work with industry sponsors to find ways they can be deployed using their newly developed knowledge. Increasingly our industry bodies are putting young people in charge of their consumer engagement, education and capacity building programs and they realise the importance of having young people involved in agriculture and promoting and supporting innovative consumer awareness programs.

What plans do you have to extend the existing programs to include other regions or incept new initiatives?

The demand for the program is there from schools nationally, especially the Archibull Prize, but with the funding we have we don't currently have the capacity to have more than 40 schools involved across three states each year – we like to visit the schools and see the entries and last year that meant we travelled 4,500km. I must admit I am hesitant to investigate how far we need to go this time!

Going forward we would like to attract more corporate sponsorship and partner with other industries such as horticulture and roll out the Archibull Prize in all states, while providing more personal development opportunities for the Young Farming Champions program participants.