

## **Regional Jobs Summit at Narrabri 3 July 2009**



CEO Arthur Blewitt (right) with Don Tydd and Meryl Dillon from the Northern Inland Regional Development Board, in Narrabri on Friday 3 July.

### **Summit helps region to find workers**

AgriFood Skills Australia hosted a Regional Jobs Summit in Narrabri on 3 July 2009 in collaboration with the Northern Inland Regional Development Board (NIRDB).

Close to 100 people participated in a series of discussions, panels and presentations. Extensive regional media coverage was achieved on state and national television, radio, and newspapers - including the Sydney Morning Herald, Australian Financial Review and ABC radio.

Key speakers included Don Tydd and Meryl Dillon (pictured above) from the Northern Inland Regional Development Board, Narrabri Mayor Robyn Faber and members of other Industry Skills Councils, RTOs, NSW Government departments, employment agencies, academics and researchers, and growers. Organisations included Tocal College, TAFE New England Institute, DPI Queensland, NSW DET, Central West Community College, Best Employment, Namoi Cotton, Cotton CRC, the Association of Mining Related Councils, NSW TAFE and the Central Highlands Skills Formation Strategy.

AgriFood Skills CEO Arthur Blewitt gave an overview of the aims of the Regional Jobs Summit, and Narrabri Mayor Robyn Faber highlighted problems the region faced of having a shrinking pool of workers and a lack of skills or access to flexible training.

Mayor Faber said the region had not been able to establish an effective regionally-based approach to attraction and retention of workers, made worse because the right type of training was not readily available.

“It has been difficult to get people to relocate to the region and seasonal workers are unwilling to go through a change in lifestyle and settle in the area,” she said.



Workforce attraction and retention were important considerations because skilled workers and school leavers were moving out of rural and regional communities.

The region's priority needs were for:

- professional development for business owners and managers, and the provision of higher level skills for existing workers
- development of retention strategies for the region's young people
- seeking jobs for the unemployed in Narrabri, as well as for displaced workers coming from other industries
- development of strategies and initiatives to attract and retain skilled workers and their families, 'tree changers' and business people to the region through the promotion of high-level and sophisticated job and career opportunities, linked to education and training support, lifestyle and regional growth.

### **Summit outcomes**

There was agreement that a locally driven approach through partnership of regional organisations could provide the opportunity to deliver longer-term benefits for increasing employment and productivity. This would involve up-skilling existing workers, training new entrants/job seekers, and attracting and retaining skilled new workers and their families.

There was a need to ensure that employees with specific skills were aware of local opportunities and that employers knew about employment options.

Employers needed to create new and challenging jobs to advance the careers and growth opportunities of their workforces. Local communities needed to ensure there were child care and other support services in place for families.

### **North West Advisory Group formed**

The North West Advisory Group was set up with 18 members, representing regional organisations plus AgriFood Skills, representing a cross-section of regional and local industries, employers, employment groups, regional authorities and interested stakeholders.

The group initially will seek to create a Regional Action Plan based upon three broad platforms:

- Ascertain labour needs
- Identify strategies
- Establish a skills demand calendar.

The group will seek to identify skills, job needs and worker demand across the region and to draft a strategy plan that will strengthen and promote employment opportunities across the Narrabri region, including more effective attraction and retention initiatives.

AgriFood Skills will share the cost of employing this local person for two years to promote and advance the strategy. This person would be Narrabri-based and be given support from AgriFood Skills to manage the affairs of the advisory group.