



MEDIA RELEASE

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ADVISORY COMMITTEE WELCOMES NEW DIRECTION FOR MCMILLAN CAMPUS

ECG has released a vision to build the McMillan campus into a major rural studies centre in Victoria developing a new model of training where specific rural industries can, for the first time, access specialised training developed just for them.

Industry representatives on the McMillan Advisory Committee met at the campus at Warragul to gain an overview of ECG's operations since winning the state government tender last year to manage McMillan Campus for the next 20 years.

The Advisory Committee is an independent group of industry representatives who provide advice, feedback and scrutiny of courses to ensure their relevance to community and industry needs.

Head of Rural Studies Babis Lagos told the committee McMillan has a real opportunity to build its position as a leader for rural studies training in Victoria and nationally.

"In recent years, horticulture and agriculture training has experienced a decline in student numbers nationally, despite industries crying out for skilled workers at all levels.

"ECG has taken the step to break away from the 'one course fits all' approach and is working with specific industries to develop niche or specialised programs one by one."

He said the approach is already proving successful in attracting new students.

"Despite the economic down turn and recent bushfires which have impacted on many rural people, enrolments at McMillan are up 15% this year."

ECG trainers outlined to the committee a suite of new courses developed within the past 12 months many of them course-firsts in Victoria or Australia. These include new Diploma courses for the potato and goat industries, a new Diploma in

Sustainable Agriculture, and the first certificate courses for stock agents and rural merchandises to address skills shortages and training needs in those fields.

“The expertise of the Advisory Committee and involvement from industry has played a large part in bringing these programs to fruition, “Mr Lagos said.

“Another development to the horticulture program is taking training for supervisors and managers into their workplaces so they learn management skills on the job rather than having to leave their workplace for training.

“20 participants who are employed in parks and gardens, golf clubs and landscaping businesses are currently taking part in the program with numbers likely to double this year.

“We are not aware of any other provider offering this ‘mentoring’ approach to training,” he said.

McMillan Advisory Board Chair Helene Armour said the committee supported ECG’s management of the McMillan campus.

“Following the withdrawal of Melbourne University in 2005, there were concerns that the campus and the quality of rural training could decline.

“We are particularly supportive of ECG’s industry partnership approach which in many ways reflects McMillan’s original charter, when it was established in the 1970’s, of taking learning into communities to reach farmers and commodity groups.

“A focus of the Committee will be to continue to work closely with ECG to ensure further development of higher level courses including Diploma, Advanced Diploma and possibly the first degree courses to be offered.

“Gippsland horticulture and agriculture producers represent some of the most efficient, clean and best practice industries in Australia and having access to quality, training and research is critical to their continued growth and development, “ she said.

The McMillan Advisory Committee is made up of a range of industry representatives with significant expertise and include Helene Armour (Horticulture production) John Galliene (Agriculture), Steven Rowe (Horticulture Nursery), Sandra Veerlat (international seed consultant), and Russell Bell (Potato industry).

For more information on courses at ECG’s McMillan campus visit:
www.ecg.vic.edu.au or phone 03 5622 6000.

Media inquiries:

Babis Lagos ECG Head of Rural studies 5622 6000

Helene Armour Chair McMillan Advisory Board 5626 1237