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Becoming an Ag Consultant

With demand for food and fibre projected to double over the next 40 years, agricultural consultants are becoming vital to progressive farming businesses. A new course is preparing tomorrow's agricultural consultants for the challenges ahead.

On-farm technology is becoming ever-more complex, and many would-be consultants are concerned about taking the next step because they lack cross-discipline knowledge or are unsure of the requirements in running a business.

The Graduate Certificate in Rural Science (Agricultural Consulting) meets this need, providing the knowledge and skills required to set up a consultancy business and deliver enterprise planning advice. This four-subject course is available from the University of New England through distance education mode so people can study at home in their own time. Sheep CRC scholarships are also on offer for students who plan to provide a service to the sheep industry.

Current students come from a range of environmental and agricultural backgrounds and are finding the course rewarding.

Debbie Milne, a Rural Financial Counsellor from Branxholme, Victoria said, "I have found the information to be very interesting, relevant and detailed. I would highly recommend it to any aspiring consultants!"

Murray Long, a stud sheep breeder from Ardlethan, NSW, said, "The course is great and I love it! I am finding the topics relevant with the flexibility to incorporate your own situation into completing the assignments, which is a real bonus. Obviously you can put as little or as much as you want into completing the set work, but I am really enjoying the course and I'm also discovering plenty."

The course was developed by the Sheep CRC to fill the increasing need for consultants in the sheep industry, but it was quickly realized that all agricultural industries faced this same need. Therefore the course was built with two core subjects that are not related to any plant or animal discipline, but provide skills required to work across disciplines including enterprise planning and communication. These subjects also guide the consultant in strategic planning for their own as well as their clients' businesses, how to work effectively with the media and knowledge of legal matters that are important for a consultant and their clients.

The course also offers the opportunity to gain discipline-specific knowledge through the two elective subjects, which can be chosen from a wide range of agricultural and environmental subjects. While the course has primarily been set up for professionals who already hold a degree, there are opportunities to study one or both of the core agricultural consulting subjects at an undergraduate level.

Closing date for applications is 15 January, 2010.

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