

Annual Report

2024

**An Agricultural College
With A Difference.**

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Chairman's Report

As I reflect on the past year, I am pleased to report that 2024 has been a year of significant transformation for RIST.

We successfully implemented a \$1.6 million investment to modernise our campus and training facilities, made possible through the generous support of the Victorian Government. This substantial upgrade represents our commitment to providing cutting-edge agricultural education and ensuring our facilities match the high calibre of our programs.

Despite ongoing challenges in the agricultural sector, I am proud to announce that RIST has maintained its position as one of Australia's leading non-public providers of agricultural training. Throughout 2024, we continued our tradition of excellence, delivering comprehensive training to students across the nation. The demand for our graduates from employers remains exceptionally strong and continues to grow, affirming the value and relevance of our educational approach.

The Lifetime Ewe Management program continues to stand as the most successful sheep extension program ever delivered in Australia. Together with our vocational and pre-accredited programs, alongside various national and state-based short courses, these offerings have cemented RIST's reputation for excellence, with our students remaining highly sought after throughout the industry.

As agricultural practices continue to evolve, we recognise the importance of developing critical thinking and communication skills alongside technological proficiency. We are committed to teaching students to distinguish fact from fiction in an increasingly complex digital landscape — a skill particularly crucial in agriculture, where decisions impact livelihoods, ecosystems, and food security.

Our partnerships have been instrumental to our ongoing success. We maintain strong collaborations with the school network across Victoria's southwest region, as well as with the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments, Agriculture Victoria, AWI, MLA, and ACFE. These relationships have enabled us to provide comprehensive education pathways for our students, from pre-accredited

education and agriculture traineeships through to higher education. This distinctive offering, complemented by our national non-accredited fee-for-service short course programs, continues to position RIST as a premier agricultural college in Australia.

I extend my sincere appreciation to my fellow Board members for their unwavering support and insightful counsel throughout 2024. I also wish to express my gratitude to our dedicated staff and CEO Bill Hamill for their expertise and resilience in navigating both the challenges and opportunities that this year of transformation has presented.

Finally, I want to convey my sincere thanks to the entire RIST community, including our students, parents, employers, schools, and trainers, for their continued enthusiasm and support. Together, we have not only overcome challenges but achieved significant milestones, particularly with our campus modernisation project. I look forward with optimism to the future growth and success of RIST in the years ahead.



Tony Fleetwood

TONY FLEETWOOD
CHAIRMAN - RIST

CEO's Report

As we move beyond RIST's three decades of service to the agricultural sector, I am pleased to present the CEO Report for 2024, highlighting our achievements and the continued evolution of our distinctive educational approach.

TRANSFORMATIONAL GROWTH

2024 has marked a pivotal year of growth for RIST, with transformative changes that directly enhance the educational experience for our community. Through the generous \$1.6 million investment from the Victorian Government, we've revolutionised our campus and training facilities to create an environment where students, trainers, and staff can thrive.

Our modernisation initiative included:

- Expanded and upgraded classrooms
- Acquisition of new plant and equipment, including two new buses and a telehandler
- Installation of state-of-the-art welding bays
- Integration of cutting-edge simulators
- Implementation of Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) learning experiences

These enhancements position RIST at the forefront of agricultural education, creating dynamic, technology-driven environments that foster innovation and sustainability.

EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE AND INNOVATION

Building on our established foundation of tailored learning experiences, RIST continues to offer educational pathways that ensure seamless transitions from schooling to vocational training and higher education. Our approach remains dedicated to accommodating diverse learning styles, with particular attention to practical learners who thrive in our hands-on educational environment.

In alignment with rapid technological advancements, we have further integrated Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality, and Artificial Intelligence into our curriculum. These technologies are revolutionising how our students learn and prepare for careers in modern agriculture, equipping them with critical skills for data-driven decision making in areas such as crop health analysis, pasture optimisation, and livestock management.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The success of RIST would not be possible without the collaborative efforts of many dedicated individuals and organisations.

I extend my sincere gratitude to:

- The RIST Board, particularly Chairman Tony Fleetwood, for their expert leadership and guidance
- Our dedicated staff and highly engaged trainers
- Industry partners including AWI, MLA, and Agriculture Victoria
- Our host farms for providing invaluable practical learning environments
- The Victorian and Commonwealth Governments for their continued financial support
- The Australian Wool Education Trust and all stakeholders who enable our educational mission
- Parents, employers, and partner schools who entrust RIST with their educational journey

CONCLUSION

As we look to the future, RIST remains committed to nurturing curious, courageous, and compassionate agricultural professionals. We believe in creating an educational environment where human ingenuity drives technological innovation, and where students develop not only technical expertise but also the qualities of humility, adaptability, and service.

Together with our partners and stakeholders, we continue to forge ahead, empowered by a shared commitment to excellence in agricultural education and training — preparing the next generation to shape the future of sustainable food production and environmental stewardship.



Bill Hamill

BILL HAMILL
CEO - RIST

Director Profiles



Tony Fleetwood

CHAIRMAN

Tony Fleetwood is a past President of the Grassland Society and has been involved in a number of rural industry associations. He owns and operates a prime lamb operation in Western Victoria and is a strong advocate for training and education in agriculture.

Tony was Chairman of the Board from July 2009 to July 2017. He was re-elected Chairman in May 2023.



Joff Macleod

DEPUTY CHAIRMAN

Joff joined the Board of RIST in 2023. He is a Director of Terra Australis Advisory where he is responsible for advising groups of large private clients in all aspects of business. Prior to establishing Terra Australis Advisory, Joff was a partner in the Private Client division of PwC in Melbourne.

Joff sits on the board of various large family groups and private enterprises in the agriculture and financial services sectors. His keen interest in the agricultural sector extends to operating a small cattle farm at Yea in Victoria.

A graduate of The University of Melbourne, Joff has a Bachelor of Commerce and a Master of Taxation and has in excess of 35 years in the Chartered Accounting profession.



Lachie Brown

Lachie joined the board of RIST in 2024. He is State Wool Manager Victoria/Riverina, South Australia, and Tasmania for Elders Ltd. Prior to this he held roles with AWB in grower services and marketing.

After growing up on his family wool/prime lamb property, Lachie studied a Bachelor of Agricultural Science at University of Melbourne. He is passionate about educating and developing the next generation of talent in agriculture and is heavily involved in training and mentoring in the wool industry.



Barbara Young

Barbara joined the Board of RIST in 2015. She has a degree in law and is a member of the Law Institute in Victoria. She has chaired the boards of the Warrnambool and District Base Hospital and South West Healthcare. She has had many years' involvement in the higher education sector in a number of roles at Deakin University. Barbara is a strong advocate of education in the agribusiness sector and its importance for rural communities.



Tony Gregson AM

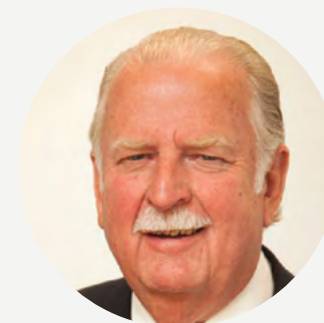
AM FRACI FTSE

Tony has a distinguished academic career having held academic appointments at the Universities of Melbourne, Oxford, New England and North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Currently he is Chairman of the Melbourne University Botany Foundation and the Victorian Committee of the Crawford Fund, a Board Member of the Crawford Fund and of FAR (Field Applied Research) Australia. He was elected to the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering in 2003 and made a Member of the Order of Australia in 2009 for his contribution to agricultural research. Tony operates a 3500 hectare property in Western Victoria.



Fiona Best

Fiona joined the RIST board in 2023. She is the CEO of Birchip Cropping Group where she works with her team to bring relevant agricultural research and extension opportunities to farming communities by attracting investments to improve the prosperity of broadacre farming locally, regionally and nationally. She has also had extensive experience working in the education sector teaching agriculture. After growing up on her mixed enterprise family farm, cropping and producing sheep, Fiona studied a Bachelor of Agricultural Science (Honours) and Bachelor of Commerce at the University of Melbourne. Fiona is the Regional Director, Victoria Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub.



John Stewien

John is a director of ZSA Pty Ltd and an accredited mediator by the Institute of Arbitrators and Mediators. His past positions include a Conciliator with the ACCS Victoria, Commissioner ERC Victoria, Advisor to the Federal Public Service Merit Protection Commission, General Manager Industry/ Teaching Services at the Melbourne Institute of Textiles and National General Manager Personnel Operations Kmart Australia, Officer Royal Australian Navy including Commanding Officer HMAS ADVANCE and a Master Mariner – Foreign Ongoing.

Staff Profiles



Bill Hamill

CEO

Bill is passionate ambassador for rural Australia and delivering affordable access to quality and industry aligned education to the agricultural sector and young people interested in agriculture. Bill has held a number of board and senior management positions in national companies focusing on rural and regional Australia. He has successfully overseen significant growth and diversification for RIST over the past twenty years. Bill was appointed to the newly established Victorian Skills Authority Advisory Board in 2021. Bill also held positions on the Victorian committee of the Independent Tertiary Education Council of Australia (ITECA) and is a member of ITECA's national VET committee.



Helen Read

OPERATIONS MANAGER

Helen has been with RIST since 2015 and oversees the student management and compliance systems for the organisation.

Helen manages administration support for the Vocational Training program, quality management systems, statistical reports and works closely with the Chief Executive Officer in operations, marketing and promotion of RIST programs.



Raelene Laidlaw

PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Raelene joined the organisation in 2012 as part of the Wool Classing program. Raelene has had extensive experience in the wool industry both as a wool classer and trainer. She completed a Master Classer in 2009. Raelene coordinates the Certificate IV in Wool Classing and administers RIST Shearing and Wool Overview Programs. Raelene is a National Wool Handler judge.



Bec Malseed

NATIONAL PROGRAM MANAGER

Bec joined the RIST team in February 2017 as a Program Coordinator. Prior to this she worked as administration support in the livestock veterinarian industry. In 2019 Bec was appointed to oversee the Lifetime Ewe Management Program, Heifers for Profit and Weaners for Profit. Bec is passionate about assisting farmers to achieve best practice skills through our training programs at RIST and building networking opportunities that bring industry wide benefits to producers.



Andrea Speirs

COMPLIANCE & CURRICULUM SUPPORT

Andrea joined the RIST team in March 2024. Andrea Speirs is an experienced administrator skilled in business management, reporting, and stakeholder relations. With a strong background in administration, policy writing, and budgeting, she has most recently held key roles with the Country Fire Authority. Andrea holds a Master of Arts in Writing and Literature and is pursuing a WHS certification. In addition, Andrea has strong ties to agriculture and has resided on a farm in the local area for the past 26 years.



Tamara Hardy

PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Tamara joined the organisation in 2017 and is a Program Coordinator in the traineeship Team, where she coordinates Certificate II and III in Agriculture students. Tamara has an Advanced Diploma in Farm Management as well as extensive industry experience. This includes working for many years in red meat and pasture research with the DPI in Hamilton as well as operating the family farm. Tamara is passionate about the Agricultural Industry and is keen to share her knowledge and enthusiasm with the students. Tamara and her family have a small acreage in Macarthur as well as a cropping property in the Wimmera.



John Byron

TRAINER & ASSESSOR

John joined RIST as a Program Coordinator in April 2022 prior to this he worked in agricultural research for 20 years as a Technical Officer for Agriculture Victoria at the Hamilton research centre working across a wide range of research projects which included pasture, wool, lamb, beef, and cropping. John also operated a dairy farm at Hawkesdale for 15 years before moving to Hamilton he's been involved in agriculture since leaving school he has knowledge in pasture management from working in the dairy industry and years of experience working with livestock and a wide range of farm machinery.



Samantha Dridan

STUDENT SUPPORT OFFICER

Samantha joined RIST in September 2018 to provide administration assistance in the curriculum and compliance functions within the operations. Samantha has an advanced Diploma of Agriculture and has been working in the wool and sheep industry for a number of years.



Tara Rich

MARKETING LEAD

Tara joined the RIST team in March 2024. She lives on her family-owned cropping and sheep enterprise in the West Wimmera with her husband and three children. With a background in Policing before completing a Bachelor of Business (Management), Tara has worked in Communication's and digital marketing as an agricultural marketing specialist. With a passion to authentically showcase the people of Australian Agriculture, she is excited to share more stories of past and present RIST students, staff and trainers, and to continue to promote Agriculture and Wool as incredible career pathways for people of all stages and ages to enter.



Gaye Cameron

CURRICULUM DEVELOPER

For more than two decades Gaye worked with RIST providing expert industry knowledge and training delivery. She assumed the role of RIST curriculum developer in 2014, bringing a lifetime of knowledge and practical experience in the development and implementation of course materials, assessment tools and MyAg compliance into RIST. Gaye has extensive experience in livestock and pasture sectors, in beef, sheep and dairy and writing course materials and developing assessment tools.



Kate Carmody

PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Kate joined RIST in 2022 as an Agribusiness entrepreneurship coordinator and now coordinates the Certificate IV and Diploma students. Kate is also a trainer and assessor across a number of units. Kate has a background in accounting and finance and join the RIST team after an extended time working from home alongside her husband and six children in a shearing contracting business. Kate holds a bachelor of commerce and bachelor of business majoring in financial planning.



Esther Glasgow

PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Esther rejoined the staff at RIST in 2018. Esther coordinates the Certificate II and III in Agriculture program in Hamilton and Terang including the VLLS course. Esther is a RIST Alumni completing a Certificate III and Diploma of Agriculture. She has extensive experience in the beef and sheep industry and runs her own sheep stud. Esther is also a MLA red meat ambassador.



Elle Bryant

PROGRAM SUPPORT OFFICER

Elle joined the RIST team in August 2024. With a veterinary technician background she brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to our staff skill set in dairy and livestock production for our Certificate IV and Diploma programs.

STUDENT IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Katy McMahon

2024 Jeremy Upton Scholarship Recipient



CAPTION

For Katy McMahon, the path to a career in agriculture was a deliberate choice. After not pursuing university immediately after high school, Katy's life was filled with getting married, buying a house, and starting a family. Yet, her passion for agriculture simmered beneath the surface, waiting for the right moment to emerge. That moment came with her decision to enrol in a Certificate III in Agriculture with Rural Industries Skill Training (RIST), and she has never looked back.

At 28, Katy's life is filled with the balancing of wearing many hats. Mum, wife, and now student; she's a beacon of determination with a passion for agriculture and life learning fueling her success.

Recently, Katy was announced as the second ever Jeremy Upton Scholarship recipient, a recognition that speaks volumes about her dedication to study and her passion for the Agricultural industry.

Juggling roles as a busy mum, wife, and student is no small feat. Katy's days are packed, yet she manages to find harmony between her family commitments and her studies RIST.

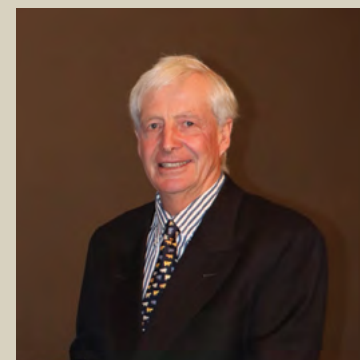
"It's always worth it," she says. Her coursework at RIST, which fits neatly into her family schedule with classes every week, has offered her a comprehensive view of the agricultural sector. The exposure to various enterprises and interactions with esteemed guest speakers have enriched her learning experience immensely.

Recently, Katy graduated from the Certificate III in Agriculture and she will continue on in her learning journey in 2025 in the Diploma of Agriculture.

"Working in Agriculture is something I'll do for the rest of my life"



KATY MCMAHON PICTURED RECEIVING HER CERTIFICATE III IN AGRICULTURE AT GRADUATION IN AUGUST 2024, BY RIST CHAIRMAN TONY FLEETWOOD.



JEREMY UPTON

The Jeremy Upton Scholarship, established in 2023, was founded in the legacy of the late Jeremy Upton and his commitment to supporting young people in accessing agricultural training.

As RIST's former chairperson, Mr Upton was passionate about fostering the next generation of agricultural leaders.

The scholarship aims to honor his legacy by providing essential financial assistance to students like Katy, ensuring that they can pursue their educational and career aspirations.

For Katy, receiving this scholarship has been a hugely rewarding experience.

"The Jeremy Upton Scholarship is a huge honor," she says. "Without it, I wouldn't be able to study the Diploma. I'm really excited that the RIST Board saw something in me."

As she looks to the future, Katy is eager to continue her studies and deepen her knowledge in the agricultural industry. Her advice to other students embarking on a similar journey later in life is straightforward and encouraging:

"The best skill I've learnt with RIST is to ask questions. Everyone in this industry encourages you to ask questions and everyone is very generous with the knowledge and information that they are willing to share with you".

Katy's story highlights the incredible impact of scholarships like the Jeremy Upton Scholarship. As she continues to study and work within the industry, Katy remains a source of inspiration for anyone daring to embrace new opportunities, no matter what season of life they are in.

JEREMY UPTON SCHOLARSHIP

We're now accepting donations.

In honouring Jeremy Upton's legacy we inspire and grow the next generation of agricultural leaders.

The Jeremy Upton Scholarship Program assists students meet the costs of tuition fees and other educational expenses, which without this support would inhibit their education and training pathways.

Be part of something with **real impact**. Donate today at rist.edu.au



Real Impact



Discover how a Jeremy Upton Scholarship helped shape 2024 recipient Katy McMahon's educational journey.

Donate today



STUDENT IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Zane's Story

From Farm Life to Leadership Excellence – Zane's Journey Through the Certificate II in Agriculture.

Growing up on a sheep farm just outside Tarrington VIC, Zane has always felt most at home among the paddocks, livestock, and to the beat of a busy farm life. Now, as a 2024 Certificate II in Agriculture graduate and recipient of the prestigious RIST Leadership Award, Zane's study journey is a true testament to dedication, passion, and leadership in the ag industry.



PICTURED: ZANE THOMAS AND RIST PROGRAM COORDINATOR & TRAINER TAMARA HARDY

While completing Year 10 at The Hamilton and Alexandra College, Zane undertook the Certificate II in Agriculture course through RIST. Balancing study, schoolwork, and farming duties at home, he embraced the challenge head-on—earning the title of Proximate Dux for Year 10 in the process.

"I always loved my RIST days," Zane shared. "It was great to get through the course. I learnt a lot of new things—it really solidified my knowledge."

Coming from a sheep property, Zane found the crutching elective to be especially rewarding. *"I crutched the dry ewes by myself the other week," he said. "I even gave a classmate a hand crutching his sheep one weekend too."*

"I always loved my RIST days,"

His willingness to lend a hand and share his knowledge earned him high praise from RIST staff. Program Coordinator & Trainer Tamara Hardy said, *"Zane was very deserving of receiving the award. He showed leadership throughout the course—always very happy to help out classmates and share ideas."*

"It feels good to get the leadership award," Zane said. "I like helping others, so it feels great to be recognised. It helps me learn, too."

"It's a great starting place if you don't know anything about Ag. It's worthwhile to add or build your industry knowledge."

As he looks ahead to completing his VCE, Zane hasn't ruled out further study in agriculture.

"I might possibly study the Certificate III in Agriculture or a course at uni," he said. "If I were to have a career in Ag, I dare say I'd go into it as a stock agent."

Zane encourages other students—whether new to agriculture or from a farming background—to give the course a go. *"It's a great starting place if you don't know anything about Ag. It's worthwhile to add or build your industry knowledge."*

With a bright future ahead and a clear passion for the land, Zane has proven that leadership in agriculture starts with a willingness to learn, share, and get your hands dirty.

As Zane puts it:

"It was always a cracking day at RIST."



STUDENT IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Ben's Story

Ben – 2024 Certificate III in Agriculture graduate and Excellence in Study award recipient.

Growing up on his family's sheep and crop farm in Lake Bolac, Ben has always felt at home on the land and developed a strong passion for agriculture from a young age. Working closely with his dad taught him the value of resilience and smart decision-making in a challenging industry.

"Someone who inspires me in the agricultural industry is my family, especially my dad... In the future, I hope my crops and sheep will thrive as well as his do."



BEN PICTURED AT HIS MID-YEAR GRADUATION RECEIVING HIS EXCELLENCE IN STUDY AWARD FROM RIST CHAIR, TONY FLEETWOOD

In 2024, whilst completing his VCE, Ben graduated from the Certificate III in Agriculture at RIST. A course highlight was embracing the practical, hands-on learning the course offered, *"Doing the Cert III has given me a deeper understanding of the thought processes and operations behind the work we do on the farm,"* he says.

Along the way, Ben gained skills in welding, animal health and farm chemicals, helping prepare him for future employment. Ben's commitment and passion were recognised at the 2024, mid-year graduation where he received the Excellence in Study Award, awarded to a student who consistently demonstrates outstanding academic achievement and dedication to learning.

Reflecting on his time at RIST, Ben highlights the relationships he's built with trainers and classmates, as well as the specialised knowledge he's gained from visiting experts. The supportive environment fosters learning and camaraderie, making his experience truly memorable.



BEN WITH HIS KELPIE JESS AT A WORKING DOG CLASS

"My time with RIST has been incredible.

In addition to meeting new friends and bringing Jess, my dog, to dog school (where she's already learning skills that are proving useful in the yards), one of the biggest highlights has been the trainers.

They build such strong connections with the students, regardless of age, and really know how to communicate and get along with us.

They're always willing to help.

They are fun, likeable, engaging, supportive and approachable.

I've also really appreciated the external teachers who came in for a day to share their specialised knowledge.

They explain things in a way that makes sense and is easy to grasp.

I've learned so much from them".



STUDENT IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Jake's Story

Jake – 2024 Certificate III in Agriculture graduate and Excellence in Study Award recipient

Jake has always had a strong connection to the land. Based in Hamilton, Victoria, he's an active member of his family's sheep enterprise Chrome Sheep Studs.

In 2024 whilst completing his VCE, Jake graduated from RIST's Certificate III in Agriculture and was honoured with the Leadership Award, recognising his natural ability to positively shape classroom interactions and support the learning of his peers.



JAKE RECEIVING HIS AWARD FROM TONY FLEETWOOD

"One of the most enjoyable things about studying at RIST is the hands-on activities, such as drenching and vaccinating sheep," he reflects. He also valued the supportive environment created by both the trainers and fellow students, which fostered learning and lasting friendships.

"I like the diversity in the work that is required to run farms and the hands-on type of work that is included in it," Jake shares. Looking ahead, Jake is considering further studies, like a Diploma at RIST, but he knows that getting practical field experience is key first. He dreams of managing a sheep stud in Western Australia, but ultimately, he hopes to return to his family farm and take over from his dad when the time is right.

For anyone considering enrolling in an Agriculture course with RIST, Jake encourages others to follow their passions, saying, *"Just do it. It's an amazing course, and it was definitely worth my time."*



JAKE PICTURED IN ADMINISTER LIVESTOCK MEDICATIONS CLASS



Agriculture Courses

Certificate II in Agriculture

With a focus on practical, relevant skill development, the Certificate II program continues to grow and expand year on year. Students participated in a broad range of hands on learning covering basic farm machinery, fencing, livestock handling, workplace communications, farm water supply, animal welfare, workplace health and safety and electives such as crutching, wool handling, agronomy and dairy.

Industry exposure plays a pivotal role in their learning journey with visits to local farms where businesses generously sharing their knowledge and expertise, and also provide opportunities to practice work-place relevant skills in real life.

Certificate III in Agriculture

Building upon their foundational knowledge, students undertake an 18 month learning journey which expands both their skills and agricultural horizons. Students graduated in 2024 from this challenging program which covers topics from animal health, biosecurity and agronomy to chemical use, welding and technology.

Visits and practical opportunities with local host farms continues to provide access to new and innovative farming practices and thinking, challenging our students perspectives and outlooks.

Certificate IV in Agriculture

With a curriculum spanning livestock production, agronomy, agribusiness, work health and safety and entrepreneurship, learners undertaking their Certificate IV in Agriculture undertake a transformative journey over the course of 12 to 24 months. What sets this qualification apart is its adaptability. Offered across multiple delivery points, including Hamilton, Terang and virtual classrooms, students have the freedom to choose the location that aligns best with their needs and commitments. This accessibility ensures that individuals can pursue their educational goals without sacrificing travel time away from work.

Diploma of Agriculture

Deliberately structured to provide aspiring, new or established farm business workers or managers with a comprehensive understanding of various facets of the industry, the Diploma of Agriculture challenges and extends learners. Industry leading experts are engaged to cover topics such as business management, farm planning, budgeting, livestock production, agronomy, work health safety, and staffing. Participants delve deeply into their own enterprises building the tools and resources they need to not only learn but develop their role and business.



Shearing and Wool Courses

Certificate II and Certificate III in Shearing

Support from the Victorian Government's Regional and Specialist Training Fund (RSTF) aided in the delivery of three shearing schools throughout South West Victoria in 2024. In conjunction with AWI (Australian Wool Innovation), professional coaching was delivered in-shed to shearers by our experienced trainers.

Certificate IV in Wool Classing

Whilst the wool industry continues to face challenging outlook, interest in Wool Classing training has not slowed down. With students now spread throughout Victoria, training in this program is delivered in a wide variety of mediums – virtual classes, in person tutorials, wool store and sale tours, and practical in shed training. Another cohort of students completed their qualification in 2024 obtaining their AWEX stencil.

Wool Overview

With the support of Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) RIST delivered four shearing industry VET in schools programs to secondary school groups in 2024. Overviews in 2024 were delivered to over 30 students at 4 local schools;

- **Mercy College**
- **Good Shepherd**
- **Monivae College**
- **Hawkesdale College**



CERT II AG GROUP 2: MARK PURCELL, ZANE THOMAS, HARRY CROFT, SAM HALL, HARRY LINKE, ANGUS ROWE, LIAM DWYER, ARCHIE COATES, MASON HUNT, MITA RATANA 2024



National Programs

A YEAR OF RESILIENCE AND ADAPTATION

The year 2024 presented a series of challenges for Australian farmers, particularly across regions that experienced a severe lack of autumn rain, resulting in minimal pasture growth heading into winter.

This unprecedented dry spell forced many farmers to rethink their feeding practices, adapting to new strategies, including early weaning, in an effort to maximise limited fodder resources.

In this environment, the value of education and adaptive management was more apparent than ever. The Lifetime Ewe Management (LTEM) course emerged as a vital tool for farmers, offering strategies to address these pressing challenges. For those who had previously participated in LTEM, or were enrolled in the course during 2024, the ability to revisit course materials allowed them to recalibrate their approaches.

Both courses experienced steady delivery in 2024, and we expect their expansion in 2025, with exciting new opportunities in the pipeline.



Feedback from Heifers for Profit and Weaners for Profit participants continues to inform ongoing improvements to these courses, particularly as we build a broader trainer network to ensure delivery across Australia. These programs provide farmers with crucial tools to increase productivity and profitability, and the insights gained from these groups are invaluable in shaping future training content.

Additionally, trainers have highlighted the strength of the community learning model, with participants benefiting from the shared experiences and support of like-minded farmers. This peer-driven approach has fostered a rich learning environment, enabling farmers to troubleshoot and adapt in real-time.

ONGOING SUPPORT AND COLLABORATION:

RIST is grateful to Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) for its continued financial support. This long-standing partnership with AWI remains a cornerstone of LTEM's success, ensuring that wool growers across Australia can access the essential knowledge and skills needed to sustain their businesses into the future.

TRAINER HIGHLIGHTS AND PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK:

Feedback from participants has been overwhelmingly positive, with many noting that the practical insights provided through the course were instrumental in navigating the challenges of the season.

"The LTEM course provided us with the knowledge and confidence to make better decisions in the face of adverse weather conditions. Revisiting the key principles around ewe nutrition and adjusting our practices has helped us get through this tough season."
— LTEM Participant

"Would highly recommend and will get our station manager to complete as well. Thanks so much, I really got an enormous amount out of this course and it will have a massive impact on how we manage our property."
— LTEM Participant in South Australia

"Thank you for the training. What I have learnt from the course will help me going forward in trying to boost lambing percentages and ewe health" – LTEM Participant in Victoria

Note: Participant quotes and feedback are based on anonymous survey responses and personal interviews conducted throughout the year.



Pre-Accredited Training

Designed to provide agricultural workers with the skills they need, when they need them, RIST delivered 11 different training programs throughout 2024.

These workshops are crafted to provide the critical skills and knowledge in specific areas of agriculture and technology.

Animal Nutrition

Designed to provide learners with the basic skills and knowledge of animal nutrition and the role it plays in maximising animal health and performance in agriculture. Learners develop the skills to analyse livestock condition and health, as well as the knowledge to assess pastures to ensure livestock are receiving a balanced and nutritious diet.

Basic Chainsaw Operations

Focussing on the basic essential skills in and practical experience in operating and maintaining a chainsaw safely, participants perform tasks in a safe work manner ensuring personal protective equipment complies with Australian Standards and understanding the importance of workplace health and safety principles.

Basic Tractor Operations

The basic skills and practical experience to safely operate a tractor. Learners develop their understanding of the importance of safety and the risks associated with operating tractors.

Excel

Introductory and Intermediate: designed to assist learners who do not have the basic skills in Microsoft Excel to gain confidence and familiarity with the software. As their skills develop, and they require additional skills, the intermediate course will then extend learners with exposure to more advanced functions and tools within the software.

Introduction to Soils

Catered to individuals who feel they do not have the basic chemistry knowledge needed, this workshop provides foundational understanding across soil composition, formation and structure, fertility and chemical composition.

Introduction to Welding

With a focus on practical based experiential learning, this workshop assists participants gain basic knowledge and practical skills for welding with MIG (gas metal arc) welding processes, as well as an understanding of the importance of workplace health and safety principles.

Pasture Plants for Production

With a focus on basic plant identification, this workshop covers the basics of plant and species recognition as relevant to an agricultural enterprise. The goal is to assist learners develop their knowledge, confidence and skills in plant and weed identification to support them in their day to day roles.

Ruminant Nutrition

Designed to provide the fundamental skills and knowledge to understand rumen function and how management impacts on its efficiency. Learners develop skills and knowledge relating to nutritional components and quality testing of feed, basic digestive anatomy and rumen function, impacts of management decisions on the rument and herd/flock health.

Smart Tools for Smartphones

Targeted at individuals with limited understanding of mobile digital technology, the course aims to increase learner confidence and understanding in the use of this technology in the context of agriculture and their workplace.

Understanding WHS from an Agricultural Perspective

The basic skills and knowledge of work health and safety legislation, codes of practice and enterprise policies and procedures in the context of an agricultural enterprise. Learners are introduced to the responsibility of the employer and the employee, duty of care in the workplace, and awareness of emergency planning on the property.



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Rachael McGrath

The world is your oyster in the dairy industry, with Rachael McGrath



Rachael McGrath is a established leader in the Australian dairy industry while playing a vital role in the operation of her family's dairy farm in Orford, South West Victoria.

Now at 29 years old, working alongside her father and uncle, both aged in their 70s, she has embraced managing their full Jersey herd and innovative farming practices, alongside leadership roles that have opened up for her within the industry. Her deep connection to the land and her passion for the dairy industry are evident in every aspect of her work.

The McGrath farm runs on a highly organised schedule to ensure efficiency and optimal care for their Jersey herd. *"We move the cattle to fresh pasture every 12 hours to give them access to the best quality feed,"* says Rachael. *"It's crucial for the health of the cows and the productivity of the farm."*

Milking takes place twice a day, and each cow's needs are closely monitored using collars that track their health data.

"The collars help us monitor things like rumination and heat detection, and they also alert us to early signs of illness, such as mastitis," Rachael explains. *"Being able to track this data quickly means we can act fast, ensuring the cows stay healthy and the milk quality remains high."*

The farm has also embraced advanced technologies to increase efficiency. *"We've implemented solar-powered systems to boost energy and reduce costs—solar boosters for the dairy and to heat the water for cleaning equipment,"* says Rachael.

"We also use a cold bore water system to quickly cool the fresh milk quickly to vat temperature for storage." Innovation is key to keeping the farm profitable, and Rachael is proud of their commitment to these efforts.

"Dairy has been a big part of our family, we wouldn't really be doing anything else. It's a love for the animals, the taking care of them, you wouldn't change it".

Growing up on the family farm, Rachael was always immersed in farm life. At age 14 following a tragic workplace accident, the family made a bold decision to invest in a state-of-the-art dairy facility, transitioning the land where the dairy now operates from a Merino sheep farm to a dairy. The farm has been evolving since, with their full Jersey herd—known for their adaptability, temperament, and milking quality—leading the way.

"The dairy farm was converted from sheep country, lots of stone down there, we've been doing paddock renovations every year. As you can see, we are getting nice, lush pastures in summer".

It wasn't until her late teens Rachael leaned in on her interest for dairy farming. *"I didn't want to be at school anymore,"* Rachael shares. *"Mum said you can leave school and work on the farm as long as you do more study".*

Rachael recalls the early milking years, *"When I left school, we first started milking here in the new dairy,"* she recalls. *"We were always joining to Jerseys purely because we didn't have a lot of money, and they were cheap! And we kept breeding that way"*

Their commitment to establishing an operating dairy shifted slightly when her brother formed an interest in showing cattle. *"My brother, who was in his early teens, wanted to show cows, so I did too."* And Rachael's interest in showing blossomed from there. *"I like breeding nice cows,"* she says. *"It's important to enjoy what you do, and it grew from there."*

Reflecting on the change in the family Jersey herd since early days showing, it is clear Rachael is proud of the cows they breed and milking today. *"I take my grandfather into the paddock, and we look at the cows and he's like, if I was still milking cows, I wouldn't be mad about milking these"*

Rachael's dedication to personal growth led her to pursue a Certificate IV in Agriculture at RIST, where she quickly realised the breadth of opportunities available within the dairy sector.

"I think I found my passion for the dairy industry in my early 20's when I was studying the Certificate IV and I learnt that there is so much more to the dairy industry".

Initially *"I thought it (dairy) was just milking cows and being out on the farm,"* she explains.

"But there's actually so many different ways to be in the dairy industry without physically putting cups on. There are service providers, working in factories, there's science – that's what I think is the best thing about dairy, there's so much involved and it takes a lot of people to run it."



During her time studying the Certificate IV, Rachael was introduced to the Gardiner Foundation's New Zealand Study Tour, a unique opportunity that took her to New Zealand for a dairy-focused study trip.

"Before I knew it, I was heading to New Zealand with a group of friends I made while studying."

This experience gave Rachael invaluable insights into global dairy practices and broadened her professional network. *"Meeting industry experts and learning about different aspects of dairy was such a valuable experience."*

"I thought the Certificate IV was perfect, because we had our own dairy group, and I was studying alongside people who were like-minded,"

"It opened doors for me, and I started to see all the opportunities in the dairy industry beyond just the farm work."

After completing her Certificate IV in Agriculture aged 24, Rachael's hunger for more knowledge led her to pursue a Diploma of Agriculture.

"I was hungry to learn more about things like agronomy, OHS, and business management,"

"We had an accident on the farm, and I realised how important it is to have a solid understanding of safety and business operations. The Diploma gave me the skills I needed to be more confident in managing the farm and leading the team."

For Rachael, the Diploma of Agriculture was the perfect fit at the perfect time. *"When I graduated at 28, I was in a managerial position, taking on more responsibility for the day-to-day operations,"* she explains.

"I was in leadership roles and starting to take over from my parents. Dad had given me the reins a little bit, so it was a great time where the stuff that I was learning, I was able to put into practice straight away."

Rachael's commitment to leadership extends beyond the farm, and she is passionate about encouraging others to pursue a career in dairy. Rachael's leadership skills have been widely recognised, to name just a few of her accomplishments in 2024 she was the recipient of the Great South West Young Dairy Leader Award.

She has also participated in the Dairy Australia Ambassador program, been a speaker at the Australian Dairy Conference and Agrifutures Rural Womens Gala Ball and is part of the leadership team driving the South West Young Dairy Network.

Looking ahead, Rachael is excited for what the future holds. *"We've just purchased a new block of land between home and the dairy, and it's the perfect spot for running my show stock,"* she says with enthusiasm.

"I'm also really looking forward to International Dairy Week in late January, where I'll be showing 13 animals. It's a huge event, and it's always a great opportunity to showcase our work and learn from others in the industry."

Rachael encourages others to follow their passion for agriculture, saying, *"For anyone thinking about studying the Diploma, go ahead. I was able to manage the farm, be really active in other leadership roles and work and study all at the same time. I had a great support network".*

"I wouldn't have been able to do it without RIST educators, great support network."

"Everyone wanted to see me and everyone else in the class do well. It was important for me to finish the course because there is a lot of relevant information in the course and building that skillset was important to me".

For those eager to make their mark, she emphasises that the dairy world is full of potential and growth. Rachael's advice to anyone considering a career in dairy:

"Go ahead. The world is your oyster in the dairy industry."



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Chloe Dann

Finding passion in shearing, with Chloe Dann

Chloe Dann, perhaps better known as *Chloe the Shearer*, is a shining example of how passion can transform a career.

Based in the picturesque landscapes of South Gippsland, Victoria, she has fully immersed herself in the world of shearing and sheep management. For Chloe, shearing isn't just a job; it's an addiction that courses through her veins.

Reflecting on her journey, Chloe recalls a seasoned shearer advising her, *"Look out, shearing gets in your veins."* That sentiment has proven true as she now finds joy in watching newcomers discover the thrill of the trade, affectionately referring to it as having *"sheep s*** on the brain."*

Chloe's shearing career began after landing a job at Phillip Island Nature Parks as a Farm Assistant on Churchill Island (Moonar'mia) where she runs the farming activities including shearing, blacksmith, whip cracking, working dog and cow milking demonstrations. She also provides animal care and welfare for the animals and runs volunteer programs to encourage community involvement.

In 2018, she completed her Certificate II in Shearing with RIST. Recalling the week long shearing school at Mortlake as a highlight, Chloe wholeheartedly recommends the course and encourages others who are considering a career in shearing to give it a go.

"Doing the Certificate II in Shearing is a foot in the door to the industry. If you're new to the field, it provides essential support and learner packs, which is invaluable since starting out can be quite expensive."

This foundational training launched her career on the right foot, equipping her with the skills and confidence needed to thrive in today's competitive industry.

With shearing season in full swing, Chloe is actively involved in various events. She shares her insights on The Sheep Show Podcast, engaging listeners with her knowledge of all things sheep. Her passion shines as she educates others during the Callignee Introduction to Sheep Workshop and recently performing live shearing demonstrations at the Doveton Show.

Beyond shearing, Chloe is committed to the welfare of sheep. She understands that managing a flock can be overwhelming, particularly for peri-urban sheep owners who may not be experienced in managing the health and welfare of sheep, which is why she offers tailored Mob Management Plans. These plans alleviate the stress of sheep ownership by prioritising the goals and best interests of her clients' flocks.

In addition to shearing, Chloe provides a range of sheep husbandry services, including drenching, hoof trimming, lamb marking, and vaccinations. Chloe also takes pride in her peri-urban sheep rescue and rehoming service, showcasing her dedication to the welfare of sheep. Her approach is comprehensive, combining practical skills with a passion for education.



As she reflects on her journey, Chloe offers a gentle reminder to anyone feeling stuck in a job or life they dislike,

"It's never ever too late to find what sets you on fire."

For her, that fire is shearing — a passion she continues to nurture and share with others.

Follow Chloe on her journey as she continues to contribute with energy and passion to the Sheep industry. You can connect with her on TikTok, Instagram or Facebook @Chloe the Shearer.

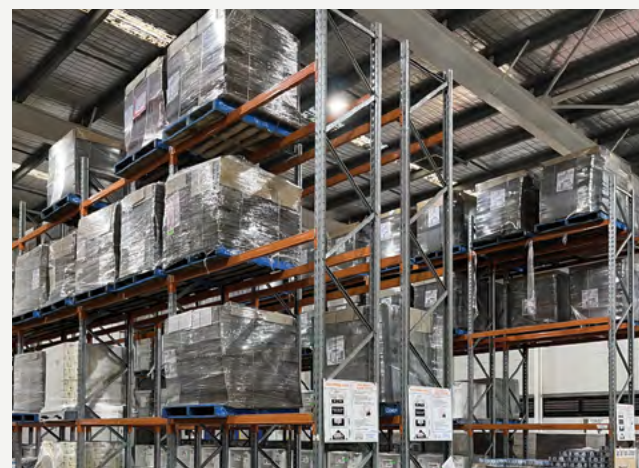
HIGHLIGHTS AND EVENTS

2024 Agriculture Course Highlights

Certificate II in Agriculture, Fonterra Factory Tour

As part of Animal Health units, Students toured the Fonterra milk processing plant at Cobden VIC.

Students toured the Fonterra milk processing plant in Cobden VIC where they were exposed to the processing cycle from tanker to palate. Developing their understanding of the supply chain process beyond the farm gate is an invaluable learning experience for students. Seeing firsthand the technology, automation and robotics involved was eye-opening and a real highlight for students.



PALLETS OF BUTTER AND MILK AT THE FONTERRA PROCESSING PLANT AT COBDEN

Diploma of Agriculture, Boldrewood Dairy Farm Tour

Our diploma of Agriculture students visited Boldrewood Dairy, in Bessiebelle VIC as part of their Livestock production units.

As part of their livestock production training, the farm tour at Boldrewood Dairy in Bessiebelle VIC (owned and operated by RIST Trainer Melissa McDonald and her husband) provided students an opportunity to see a high performing agricultural businesses in action. Bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and real world practice, these farm tours provide valuable insights into effective management practices and industry standards, enhancing their professional expertise.



DIPLOMA STUDENTS AT BOLDFREWOOD FARM

Certificate III in Agriculture, Industry Tour

Venturing beyond the borders of Victoria and into New South Wales, The Industry Tour immersed students in the vast and diverse career pathways on offer in Agriculture today.

Across three days experiences ranged from a tour of The Big Strawberry and Avocado Farm at Koonoomoo VIC, to setting foot on a 25,000 head capacity cattle feedlot operation at Hells Gate in Maude NSW.

Other highlights included visiting Case O'Connors, Grizzly Ag, the historic Yanga Homestead and Woolshed, a visit to Kyalite Pistachio Farm, Hazeldene's Poultry Farm in Yarrawalla VIC, and learning more about the intricate processes involved in producing wool products at the Creswick Woolen Mill.

Students were treated to a comprehensive exploration of various agricultural commodities. *"The tour really highlighted to students the diversity and opportunities that are available in a career in ag"* shared Trainer and Assessor John Byron. *"Small changes in the way businesses operate can have a real impact on profitability, which was really impressive"* he added.

Witnessing firsthand the wide variety of opportunities, students left feeling inspired for where their own career path in agriculture may one day take them.



STUDENTS PICTURED AT HISTORIC YANGA WOOLSHED, AND AT HELLS GATE CATTLE FEEDLOT

HIGHLIGHTS AND EVENTS

2024 Events Overview

Sheepvention

Sheepvention proved to be another fantastic event to catch up with the RIST and wider community richly connected to agriculture and the world's best fibre.

Highlights included sponsoring the wool handling competition, come and try shearing and wool handling sessions, huge lineups for test drives of our tractor and header simulators and celebrating the achievements of RIST students and Alumni who were competing in their respective sheep and ram' competitions. We look forward to the event in 2025!



Information Sessions

Held annually in August, our information sessions offer students and their families an insight into what studying agriculture with RIST will look like.

The sessions also provide the chance to tour facilities, to meet staff and to network with potential fellow classmates. We were blown away by the large turnout for the 2024 Hamilton session which filled our lecture theatre and made for a fantastic evening of question time and conversation.



Careers in Agriculture Taster Day

Secondary school students get a taste of agricultural career opportunities.

In partnership with Glenelg and Southern Grampians Local Learning and Employment Network (GSGLLEN), RIST hosted the annual Careers in Agriculture Taster Day for secondary school students through the Glenelg and Southern Grampians region.

Students from Monivae College, Baimbridge College, Good Shepherd College, The Hamilton and Alexandra College, Balmoral K-12 College, and Heywood Secondary College took part in the immersive event designed to showcase the diverse and exciting career opportunities available in the agriculture industry.

Held at the Hamilton Campus, the day offered hands-on experiences in shearing, livestock handling, agronomy and agricultural technology. Students were able to gain a practical insight into the modern agricultural workforce and explore potential career pathways.



Graduation 2024





Australian Wool Education Trust Scholarship

The Australian Wool Education Trust supports significant wool education initiatives in Australia.

In 2024 the following students received an Australian Wool Education Trust Scholarship to undertake their Certificate IV in Wool Classing:

- Anthony Halls
- William Hausler
- Levi McCarroll-Tate
- Julianne Sargent
- Aleisha Te Maipi

We sincerely thank the Australian Wool Education Trust for their generous scholarships which have enabled students to undertake education and training in merino wool production and handling, enhancing their ongoing career opportunities in the sector.



Trainer Acknowledgement

We would like to thank all trainers who have contributed to our programs throughout 2024. We sincerely appreciate the knowledge and expertise you share with our students.

John Byron
Gaye Cameron
Kate Carmody
Nick Carmody
Shane Carmody
Steve Cotton
Samantha Dridan
Esther Glasgow
Bill Hamill
Tamara Hardy
Raelene Laidlaw
Lexie Leonard

Harry Linke
Melissa McDonald
Laura Molloy
Scott Mullins
Mark Purcell
Helen Read
Jessica Revell
Andrea Roberts
Kathryn Robertson
Ken Solly
Joe Spicer
Tony Sutherland

We would also like to acknowledge the 25 trainers delivering our non-accredited programs Australia wide.



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