The Australian rice industry continues to work towards growing its people and their ability to move the industry forward. It is through programs like the Australian Rural Leadership Program (ARLP) and others, which these leaders continue to influence the rice industry and the communities in which they live.

The AgriFutures Rice Program supports the ARLP, which aligns with the program objective “Extension, sustainability and human capital”. The ARLP aims to enhance communities and increase the economic, social and environmental benefits for the people, communities and industries of rural, regional and remote Australia by identifying and supporting committed leaders to become inspired and highly effective at regional, state, national and international levels.

Rice grower and Extension Coordinator for the Rice Extension program, Troy Mauger is already taking steps towards leadership in his field and was awarded the ARLP scholarship for Course 25. Participating in the ARLP has provided Troy the opportunity to obtain additional skills to continue his leadership development and make a valuable contribution to his community.

On completion, ARLP graduates are encouraged to continue to seek support from and connect with their sponsors and with others through the Foundation's Leadership Engagement and Development (LEAD) Network. The LEAD Network provides a forum to sustain and develop members and to discuss key national and international issues. In addition to the formal network activities, there is a high level of informal networking across states and between Fellows of the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation and other programs, which has led to a collective benefit for rural and regional Australia.

This report is an addition to AgriFutures Australia’s diverse range of over 2000 research publications and it forms part of the AgriFutures™ Rice program, which aims to “Invest in RD&E to improve rice industry water use productivity and achieve the Dry Rice target of 1.5 t/ML by 2030”.

Most of AgriFutures Australia’s publications are available for viewing, free downloading or purchasing online at www.agrifutures.com.au.

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Introduction

The Australia Rural Leadership Program (ARLP) is a world-class strategic leadership development program, which strives to develop visionary leaders, grounded in reality, who work with both their head and their heart. The ARLP develops leaders to better understand and address key strategic issues facing primary industry, the community and rural Australia.

Graduates of the ARLP are well prepared to contribute to an industry's leadership through their high-level skills, their clear vision for the future and the strategic alliances they have developed. Through the program, they build strong links that have the capacity to create greater synergy between industries and sectors within rural and regional Australia.

The Ricegrowers’ Association of Australia (RGA) submitted an application to contribute towards a scholarships for a suitable rice industry applicant in the ARLP Course 25. It was identified through an independent process that Troy Mauger was successful in his application to the ARLP, which was also separately supported by the RGA Board and Central Executive.

These courses are an opportunity to strengthen the leaders within the rice industry and provide an opportunity for Growers to take the skills and knowledge they have learnt to strengthen their own businesses and rural communities.

The rice industry believes that it has been great leadership in the past that has brought the industry to where it is today, and through the funding of these leadership courses, it can ensure that industry leaders will continue to adapt and grow our industry.

The ARLP is one of the key leadership development initiatives that has been identified to assist the rice industry to achieve its stated leadership objectives and is further supported by a three-tiered industry specific leadership program, which also has broad industry support.
Objectives

The RGA believes that by developing leaders it is investing in the future of the rice industry. It will be these leaders that assist the rice industry to not only structurally adjust to the many drivers of change influencing the industry, but to also allow the industry to continue its economic, environmental and innovation success. Through strong leadership development, the industry will be better positioned to embrace the opportunities and tackle the challenges it faces.

For the past decade, the rice industry has been evolving and growing to understand the importance of strong leadership, and working towards an industry that truly believes in its people and its people’s ability to move the industry forward. Leaders are not only seen as leaders within the Rice Industry, they are also seen as leaders within communities, this is something that the Rice Industry is very proud of and hope these leaders continue to influence not only industry but also regional communities.

With the above in mind, the overall objective of this project is to ensure that the Australian rice industry provides an opportunity for people within the industry to build their capacity to provide influential leadership in industry and community at local, national and international levels.

Through this program and other leadership initiatives within the rice industry, it is also the objective to continue to build leadership alumni and a network of leaders within the industry.
Methodology

The ARLP is conducted by the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation. There are 35 positions available on each course and the rice industry sponsored one of those positions over a five-year period.

Each ARLP course is run over 17 months and involves six face-to-face sessions with 59 days contact. The program focuses on working with emerging and established leaders who are committed to extending their knowledge, understanding and ability, in order to be more effective in leadership roles in and for rural Australian communities and primary industries.

The ARLF is a not-for-profit organisation delivering development programs for current and future leaders of rural, regional and remote Australia. Their programs are designed to develop leaders from the ‘inside out’, use experiential learning and critical self-reflection as cornerstones for development.

The Course provides participants with experiences to; grow as an individual, develop their leadership capabilities, broaden their perspectives, learn from and mobilise a network of peers to better serve the greater good of rural, regional and remote Australia. Their alumni live across Australia and work in a wide range of industries, workplaces and communities, including NGOs, corporate and government organisations, family properties and businesses, professional organisations and local communities.

The ARLP through its Courses:

- Works with leaders who are committed to extending their knowledge, understanding and abilities, in order to be more effective in their roles.
- Develops the ‘contextual intelligence’ leaders require to understand the drivers that are shaping rural Australia and its primary industries.
- Builds leadership understanding and application through personal, regional, national and international experiences and exposure to the theories and practices of leadership.
- Improves the capacity and influence of rural leaders to contribute to and engage in all kinds of challenges – in communities, teams, organisations, industries and policy arenas.
- Expands and develops Australia’s network of informed, capable and ethical rural leaders.
- Encourages collaboration to advance and support rural, regional and remote Australia.
Chapter 1: Course 25 Insights from Troy Mauger

Introduction

Troy is the Rice Extension Coordinator for the Rice Industry Extension Program, which is administered by the Ricegrowers’ Association of Australia (RGA) and funded by AgriFutures Australia. Troy was appointed in the role in January 2019 after working as a Rice Extension Officer for four years. Prior to this, he worked in extension and project management in the dairy industry. Troy says the best part of working in extension is the interaction with farmers and seeing the adoption of new practices that increase the productivity and profitability of their business. Troy also operates a mixed irrigation farm at Jerilderie with his wife Meagan and two children Olivia, 18 and Austin, 15.

He was drawn to the ARLP because of its reputation as an ‘iconic’ and reputable leadership program. He has also witnessed the growth and development of many industry leaders who have completed the program. It’s these past participants who have acknowledged the course as an integral part of their leadership development.

Troy considered that the course would equip him with the additional skills to step up into leadership roles within the industry and his wider community. Participation in the course
would also expanded his network around Australia and provide him the opportunity to meet other participants from many different backgrounds and experiences.

Troy also acknowledged the support of his wife, Meagan, family and generous financial sponsorship and support from the RGA and AgriFutures Australia.

Highlights and lessons from the program

Troy indicated that the program has had a positive impact on his life and that three key outcomes from interaction with peers helped by feedback sessions from the cohort where:

- Increase in self-confidence
- To back himself and take more risks
- Be more open to new experiences.

Other changes reported by Troy include:

- **Reflection**: “Reflection night was one of the highlights for me. It allowed me to reflect on what is important. While reading my journal entry for that night it was all about how fortunate I and my family are. The Kimberley experience taught me a lot about what is important to me and how to incorporate that as a leader and better understand my leadership style.”

- **Values**: “I had done some work on values before but the experiential learning process of the Kimberley made values more real and meaningful. This was brought out by the location but also people. Their connection to land and resulting conversations between our groups helped me consolidate and understand my own values and practice them in real life.”

- **Assumptions**: “This was a massive learning as it brought our team unstuck and caused conflict on a number of occasions. Through this process I have learnt to not make assumptions.”

Troy reflected on the aspects of the program that had the most significant effect on him:

- “The Kimberley experience was the most significant. The experiential learning was enormous, it taught me that I am very strong mentally and physically. The reflection and feedback from my Kimberley group has had a profound impact on me by giving me things to work on to be a better leader, such as having more presence and getting out of my comfort zone and speaking up. The challenges and camping in the Kimberley showed me that it’s ok to be outside my comfort zone and to make wrong decisions. The indigenous issues that we explored has had an impact on my family, workplace and community.”

- “The fellow participants of the program have inspired me to consider what is achievable and how to make a difference. They have such a range of experiences and skills and have become a great sounding board for me.”

- “The visit to Indonesia taught me that through conversation about what, why and how we do things that we can better understand barriers that may exist, which then allows for better change to occur.”

- “The trip to Tasmania taught me the importance of bringing people along with you. Particularly politicians and the importance of communication and developing relationships.”
• “Personally I am more informed on indigenous issues and understand the significance of the relationship they have with land and other cultural sensitivities. This has led to conversation with family members who are indigenous and acknowledgement of the first people at industry events with meaning through a connection to land.”

When Troy was asked how he was applying the learning from the program, his response was as follows:

“I am applying the learning from the ARLP in the context of the major issues in my local region and the Riverina that I identified in my application to participate in the program, which were:

1. Water reform in the Murray Darling Basin
2. Changing age and social demographic
3. Connectivity
4. Research and Development in agriculture

I also identified that there were gaps in leadership in some of the identified arenas as well as the need for leadership renewal in our industry and communities.

I am now an active participant and a mentor through the Rice Industry Tier 1 Leadership program.

I joined the Jerilderie Football club (JFC) committee in an official capacity for the 2019 season. The JFC is the social fabric of the Jerilderie community. I joined the social subcommittee and organised six social functions for the year and the season was noted as the best socially in recent times. On top of this, to build the relationship between the JFC and the community I applied and received funding to run a JFNC Community Fun Day on 27 October 2019.

I have developed a balanced and informed conversation about indigenous issues in the community and industry, leading to Acknowledgement to Country occurring for the first time at the rice industry field day. Conversations with my brother in law, who is indigenous have been more focussed and in depth even though I have known him for 17 years, they have never taken place before. My brother in law is now doing his own leadership course and becoming part of the conversation on indigenous issues and sitting on advisory boards.

I will provide leadership through the implementation of my learnings, mentoring the next generation and through actively participating in decision making within the community and industry.

I will continue the practice of reflection to help with my own and growth.

I am currently a committee member of a number of community organisations, and plan to maintain these roles, and if time permits, seek out additional opportunities.

I will keep in contact with the ARLP Alumni, the rice industry Alumni and C25 to continue to learn, reflect and review leadership. Contact with the alumni’s will also keep me motivated and inspired.
On that note, I am committed to helping the industry and growers to evolve and to continue to address the many drivers of change including key contributions to developing future leaders. Developing a self-replenishing cohort of capable and effective industry leaders is essential in assisting the rice industry to adjust and continue its economic, environmental and innovation success. In addition to implementing the current Rice Industry Leadership Program, I am committed to making sure that leadership development remains a strong focus for the industry, and continuing to work with the whole industry to seek out future opportunities to support leadership development.

*I will also seek to engage with a mentor for further personal development.*
Results

From the RGA’s perspective, the results from this program continue to be a resounding success. All the participants in previous Courses have either stepped up into positions of leadership within the rice industry and their communities or grown in their existing roles. Troy Mauger is already shown this to be the case.

Furthermore, in 2016, the ARLF commissioned Deakin University to undertake a study to determine the impact of its programs on developing individual leadership performance, and how the benefits flowed to workplaces, communities and industries. All ARLF programs were evaluated as part of the study.

Research built on previous program evaluations and included a mix of surveys, focus groups and face-to-face interviews with 255 alumni from programs run over the last 25 years. In addition, 29 sponsors shared their perspectives on our alumni’s leadership journey and reflected on the contribution these leaders have made to rural and regional Australia. The research found alumni benefited from their ARLF program over the long term, through:

- increased levels of self-confidence to lead
- desire and capacity to initiate and achieve change
- capacity to mobilise resources and networks to advocate for rural and regional Australia
- progression into leadership positions where influence can be exercised
- enacting the principles of values-based leadership.

The research also found the following benefits flowed to sponsors and their stakeholders from individuals undertaking ARLF programs:

- high levels of retention and career development within the rural and regional sector
- alumni pursued leadership roles in peak rural organisations
- alumni joined key policy and decision-making committees and boards
- alumni assumed membership and leadership roles of community organisations
- increased community capacity building through intergenerational mentoring
- use of alumni networks to promote and advocate for rural and regional Australia
- high levels of volunteerism in rural and isolated communities.

Reference: Extract from ARLF Publication – Leading with vision, courage and support
Recommendations

The RGA strongly recommends that the AgriFutures Australia and the Rice R&D Panel continue to support future ARLF Programs by making funds available for suitable rice industry scholarships.

That the rice industry as a whole continue to seek ways to improve diversity in leadership roles across the industry.

That the rice industry considers establishing a network of mentors to support ongoing leadership development within the industry.

That the rice industry continue to improve its current leadership alumni networks.
Australian Rural Leadership Program (ARLP)
Scholarship for Course 25 – Troy Mauger

by Graeme Kruger
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