

# FARM WRITERS' ASSOCIATION OF NSW INC.

GPO Box 1108, SYDNEY NSW 2001  
Website: [www.nswfarmwriters.org.au](http://www.nswfarmwriters.org.au)



30 October 2020

Mr Robert Hardie  
Secretary  
Farm Writers' Association of NSW Inc  
GPO Box 1108  
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Dear Mr Hardie,

## Farm Writers Association of NSW Inc. – Annual Report 2019-20

I have much pleasure in submitting my report on the activities of the Farm Writers' Association of NSW Inc. (Farm Writers) for the year 2019-20, since the last Annual General Meeting (AGM).

### Committee

At the AGM held on 25 October 2019 the following members were elected to the Committee and have subsequently undertaken the responsibilities assigned below.

Kaaren Latham	President	
Ben Waters	Vice-President	Awards
George Hardy	Vice-President	Venue liaison
Robert Hardie	Secretary	
Stuart Hutton	Treasurer	
Ben Crow	Past President	
Bev Jordan	Committee	Agribuzz, sponsorship
Paul Dellow	Committee	Website
Matt Simshauser	Committee	Bookings, corporate members
Colin Bettles	Committee	ACAJ rep
Meg Pearce	Committee	Social media
Andrew Marshall	Committee	Photography
Kirsty Beavon	Committee	
Wilfred Finn	Committee	
Will Sykes	Committee	

It has been an extraordinary year, and I thank the committee for their input and flexibility as we adjusted, along with the rest of the world, to the environment brought about by COVID-19.

Farm Writers is an entirely volunteer organisation, and I am pleased to say all of the committee have decided to stand for re-election. Without people willing to put up their hands, on top of the commitments of their busy personal and professional lives, we could not continue to operate.

We started the year with the usual face to face functions, and I thank the committee for their assistance with publicity, bookings, venue liaison and other background activities necessary for the smooth running of those events. As we went online, they have continued to identify and liaise with speakers, and generally keep the organisation operating.

We were pleased to welcome our new Patron, the Hon. Adam Marshall MP, Minister for Agriculture, to the Christmas lunch in December 2019. Being able to round off the year at Parliament House and host the announcement of the Farmer and Young Farmer of the Year, is always a highlight of our calendar.

## **Financials**

Farm Writers' Treasurer Stuart Hutton will present a full report to members, of the financial year 2019-20. However, I am pleased to report that Farm Writers is in a strong financial position with approximately \$163,000 in cash reserves as at 30 June 2020.

There has been little financial activity over recent months, as we made a decision to conduct the webinars free of charge. COVID-19 also unfortunately resulted in the cancellation of the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists (IFAJ) world congress, to which we would have sent our Star Prize winners.

A cash surplus of \$3,738 has been achieved this financial year despite in-person activities ceasing at the end of February.

Stuart has put in another outstanding year as Treasurer, and I am grateful he has agreed to stay on in the role. My thanks for the time and effort that goes into reconciling all our event and membership transactions – and now recurring monthly payments for accounts like Zoom and our soon-to-be-released website – as well as preparing accounts for the annual audit.

## **Our Members**

In the 2019-20 financial year we had 35 Corporate Members (compared to 37 in the previous period), 21 Individual Members (24 in previous period), 22 Rural/Retiree Members (20 in previous period) and 5 Life Members (5 in previous period).

We have truly missed seeing our members at lunches and Agribuzz events over recent months. However, the networks built through Farm Writers are strong and enduring and it has been pleasing to see so many renewals despite our new (and hopefully temporary) online format. I see it as a testament to the effort put in by the committee to identify topics and speakers of interest to our members.

Our members don't just attend our events, but contribute through sponsorship of Agribuzz and by allowing their staff to serve on the committee. My thanks to all of them – new and continuing, individual or corporate – for their support over the past year.

Membership fees of Farm Writers' remain unchanged and are good value: a \$370 annual fee for Corporate Members, \$70 for individual members and \$35 for rural-retirees. Membership entitles members to a discount of \$20 for lunch seminars and \$10 for Agribuzz events.

Thanks to our membership co-ordinator Matt Simshauser for his work in following up renewals and co-ordinating Corporate Members of the Month.

## **Seminars**

We held four face to face events and six online events during the 12 months since the last AGM. There were a total of 1,365 participants – 462 people in person (an average of 115) and 903 online (an average of 150).

The numbers were boosted by a disproportionate number of big-ticket events, namely our ever-popular Christmas lunch at Parliament House, Agribuzz hosted by the National Australia Bank, and presentations on the contentious Murray-Darling Basin by the Federal and State Ministers for Water, the Hon. Keith Pitt MP and the Hon. Melinda Pavey MP. A full schedule of speakers, topics and corporate members is attached to this report.

As well as water policy, we heard from agribusiness leaders on African swine fever and the economy, and took a series of deep dives into the state's key commodities to look at the impact of bushfires, floods and COVID-19. We are grateful of their time – whether in person or remotely – to provide an update on some of the biggest issues to be facing NSW for some time.

The silver lining of going online is the ability to connect with a far wider audience than our usual Sydney-based lunches and Agribuzz events, and we had participants from all over the country. A special thanks to Secretary Robert Hardie, who set up our webinar account and has been looking after the technicalities of each event.

Pre-COVID, George Hardy and Matt Simshauser did an excellent job managing bookings and liaising with The Grace. Our thanks to the hotel as well, for its flexibility at the start of the pandemic and updates as it resumed business.

The committee continues to monitor the COVID-19 situation, and is keen to return to face to face lunches as soon as it seems feasible to do so. At this point, with a ban on mingling and restrictions on room numbers, we feel webinars are the best option to maintain the connection with our members.

We will continue our efforts to promote the interests of the NSW farm sector and attract a diverse range of high quality, engaging speakers. I thank the committee and members in advance for suggestions.

## **Agribuzz**

We held just one Agribuzz in 2020, when NAB kicked off the year in style in February, with 178 people in attendance.

Agribuzz provides an important way for Farm Writers to connect with a different demographic. We are committed to identifying engaging speakers with a good story to share about the forces that have driven their career choices, to provide insights for our members starting their own journey.

Several other events were in the early planning stages, and I thank all the sponsors for their continuing interest in hosting an event once we can do so safely. Thanks also to Agribuzz coordinator Bev Jordan for her work in liaising with sponsors, speakers and venues.

## **Our online presence**

Farm Writers' social media presence continues to grow. We now have 1,022 Twitter followers (up from 957 a year ago), 166 Facebook followers (up from 91) and 202 LinkedIn followers (up from 135). My thanks to Meg Pearce for her work through the year.

The accounts allow us to connect with a much wider audience than those able to attend our face to face functions, which has no doubt helped to boost numbers at our webinars. It is also a valuable tool for sharing the videos of our events, which we have continued to produce with the much-appreciated assistance of corporate member Anvil Media.

Work on our new website is in the final stages, and we expect to launch before the end of the year. As well as a fresh new look, the website provides greater functionality for both members and the committee. The sub-committee of Paul Dellow and Stuart Hutton has done a tremendous job of identifying a suitable designer and managing the transfer of content. Meanwhile, Paul has continued to manage the existing site, and I thank him for the time and effort he puts into updating content and sending out notifications to members about events.

## **Awards – ACAJ and IFAJ**

Farm Writers continues to provide financial and personnel support to the Australian Council of Agricultural Journalists (ACAJ) and its programs. During the year Ben Waters handed over the position as NSW representative on the ACAJ to Colin Bettles, and I thank them both for their time.

Ben continues to co-ordinate our awards program, which involves organising judges, liaising with entrants and winners and being the point of contact between the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists (IFAJ) and our winners.

Farm Writers has changed its award process slightly, promoting the following years' awards from late September through to December to ensure we have plenty of time to get entries and judge winners ahead of the national awards. Some awards have a NSW winner who then goes on to be judged at the national level, and others encourage our members to directly enter the national and international level awards.

For the 2020 awards:

- The NSW Star Prize for Rural Writing went to Samantha Townsend for her story in The Land, 'Little hand, big hearts'.
- The NSW Star Prize for Rural Broadcasting went to Nadia Daly for her piece on ABC's 7:30, 'The worst drought we've ever seen'.
- The NSW Star Prize for Photography went to Lucy Kinbacher of The Land.

Farm Writers generally sends the two major winners to the IFAJ Congress. However, the 2020 event in Denmark was cancelled as a result of COVID-19. The pandemic has also seen Australia withdraw its plans to host the world congress in 2021, due to the uncertainty over travel restrictions. It's hoped that Denmark will be able to transfer much of its planning from this year to 2021. We continue to liaise with Samantha and Nadia regarding their prizes.

## **Farm Writers - the next twelve months**

We have settled into a temporary 'normal' of online events, and continue to assess our options for the end of the year and 2021.

Even once the COVID-19 restrictions ease, we have been discussing the possibility of maintaining some online events to stay connected to our newly discovered audience of 'farm writers' and others involved in agribusiness who cannot make it to events in Sydney.

The committee is serious about its role of providing an opportunity for those involved in agribusiness to meet, network and exchange information, as well as providing access to speakers with a diverse range of views and insights.

Once again, I thank the committee for standing again, and look forward to working with them as we continue to navigate this new world.

Yours sincerely

*Kaaren Latham*

Kaaren Latham  
President  
Farm Writers' Association of NSW Inc.

## 2019-20 Calendar of events

DATE	EVENT	SPEAKER	TOPIC	CORPORATE MEMBER	ATTENDEES
25 October	Lunch – The Grace Hotel	Margo Andrae, Australian Pork Limited	African swine fever	FTI Consulting / University of New England	57
11 December	Christmas lunch + NSW Farmer and Young Farmer of the Year	Patron, the Hon. Adam Marshall MP	Wrap of the year	NSW DPI	188
13 February	Agibuzz	Rebecca Willson, Proterra Investment Advisors	Career journey	NAB Agribusiness	178
28 February	Lunch – The Grace Hotel	Craig Emerson, Craig Emerson Economics	Economic recovery following bushfires; China	Anvil Media	39
27 March	Lunch – The Grace Hotel (CANCELLED)	Antony Catalano, Australian Community Media	Rural media landscape	Cox Inall Communications	n/a
5 June	Webinar	Melinda Pavey, NSW Minister for Water, Property and Housing	Water policy	FTI Consulting	117
3 July	Webinar	Scott Hansen (NSW DPI), Matt Coulton (BOM), Phin Ziebell (NAB)	Outlook for NSW	NSW Farmers	91
24 July	Webinar	Matt Brand (Hort Innovation), Gerard Sippel (Syngenta), Sally Murfet (Inspire AG)	Outlook for horticulture	n/a	73
14 August	Webinar	Cheryl Kalisch-Gordon (Rabobank), Robert Spurway (Graincorp), John Minogue (farmer)	Outlook for grains	Grain Growers	60
4 September	Webinar	Keith Pitt, Federal Minister for Resources, Water and Northern Australia	Murray Darling Basin	n/a	500
25 September	Webinar	Adam Kay (Cotton Australia), Robert Ryan (Schute Bell Badgery Lumby)	Outlook for cotton and wool	n/a	62