

# GIPPYAg Industry Immersions

## HIGHLIGHTS

The 'Industry Immersion' program was part of the GIPPYAg project, an initiative of Food and Fibre Gippsland in partnership with CQUniversity Australia with financial support from the State Government. The program immerses high school students in a range of on-farm industry experiences to raise their awareness and knowledge of practices within the food and fibre industry whilst also showcasing future career opportunities.

Over 3 days in October and November, 60 students visited six farms to actively engage with business owners across Gippsland to see first-hand how food is produced across the region. Students were treated to tours and talks from livestock, horticultural and niche industries where they learnt different aspects of running an agricultural business, including how they address environmental sustainability, technology use, animal welfare and the career opportunities available.



The Industry Immersion hosts generously gave up their time to share their properties, knowledge and produce with the students, who travelled from both regional and metropolitan areas to attend the days.

Feedback from students, teachers and hosts was positive, with students reporting they learnt new knowledge on farming practices, career opportunities within the food and fibre industry, animal and plant biology and economical aspects of running a farm. The hosts main reasons for participating in the day related to educating students about where their food comes from and showcasing the range of varied careers available within the industry. While the majority of students were either unsure of their future career path or not interested in a career within this field, the day inspired many to think differently about the food and fibre industry as a career prospect and the range of subjects that it relates to, such as food science and technology.

Hosts, students and teachers all saw a need to include more hands-on activities in future tours to promote greater student engagement and learning but saw great value in attending or hosting the day.



## BACKGROUND

The industry immersion experience was advertised and supported financially by Careers Education Association of Australia (CEAV) who also managed the registration process. Schools eligible to register, as pre-determined by the Victorian Department of Education and Training, were emailed information on the Immersion days encouraging schools to register their interest.

Immersion hosts were identified and invited to participate through the Food and Fibre Gippsland network and/or their prominence in a certain area, namely South, West and East Gippsland. These locations were chosen to not only highlight the range of diverse agricultural industries within the Gippsland region, but to also provide ease of access for schools located within these areas.

Each Immersion day included a minimum of two farm visits and a maximum of three. The structure of each visit varied depending on the nature of the business, but generally included information on the main practices of each industry whilst undertaking a property tour, followed by a discussion on the careers available within the industry, illustrated by a summary of the service providers used by the business. Students were encouraged to ask questions and partake in hands on experiences, which for some included drinking milkshakes made from local milk, eating apples and interacting with dairy calves.



Students and teachers were surveyed to determine what they learnt from attending the Immersion day, their awareness and interest in the food and fibre industry and how this information could be used in future, for example, subject selection or teaching resources. A random sample of students were interviewed to provide feedback on the day, focusing on aspects they did and didn't enjoy and what surprised them the most. The hosts were also interviewed to understand their motivations for participating, if they had been involved in hosting tours previously, their feedback on the day and their views on connecting young people with their industry.



## PARTICIPANTS

The Industry Immersion program attracted students from years 7 through to 12.

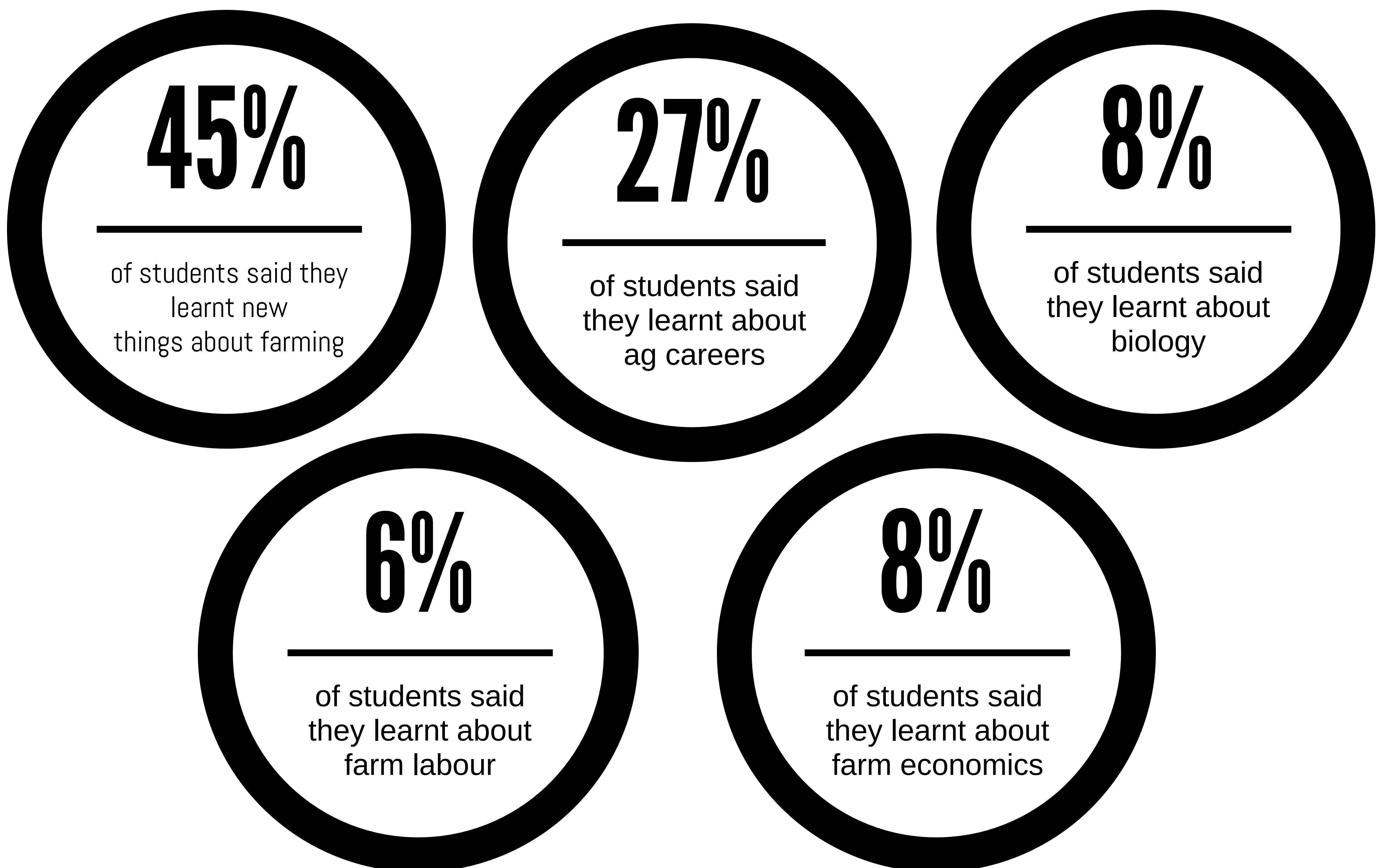
The table below shows a more in depth breakdown of attendees.

Region	Farm 1	Farm 2	Farm 3	Schools	Subjects	Students
South Gippsland	<b>Schruers &amp; Sons</b>  A third-generation celery, leek and baby leaf producer spanning several properties and 1,000 ac across Victoria	<b>Jelbert Dairy</b>  Second generation large-scale dairy operation milking over 1,000 cattle on 350 ac		Mount Alexander College  Years 7-11	Food Tech	13
West Gippsland	<b>Elderslie Organics</b>  300 ac organic dairy production spanning 5 generations, with added diversity of 80ac of free-range egg production	<b>Fankhauser Apples</b>  Fourth generation apple grower with an integrated supply chain from orchard to retailer		Taylors Lakes Secondary College  Leongatha Secondary College Years 7-10	Food Tech	36
East Gippsland	<b>Gippsland Jersey</b>  Fourth generation integrated herringbone dairy farm milking 450 cows with an onsite milk processing factory	<b>Gippsland Pearls</b>  A newly established business growing snails and gourmet mushrooms	<b>Lakes Entrance Fishermen's Co-op</b>  A 20-fleet fishing operation that sells directly to customers onsite	Sale Specialist School  Years 7-12		14
<b>TOTAL</b>						<b>63</b>

## SURVEY RESULTS

Forty-eight students and seven teachers completed the evaluation survey, resulting in a 76% and 78% response rate for students and teachers, respectively. Most students enjoyed their on-farm experience. Of the 34 students who completed the qualitative survey questions, 94% provided a positive response, with comments relating to generally enjoying the day (50%), interacting with animals (22%), learning new information (19%), and being impressed by sustainable farming practices (6%) and technology use (3%).

The main issue raised by students about the day was a lack of hands on activities, with 59% of the qualitative responses reporting this. Other issues raised about the day included a lack of interest in the tours (11%) and minor complaints such as farm smells (7%), lengthy travel to get to and from the farms (7%) and issues with the days schedule (7%).



Students reported having a greater appreciation of what's involved in operating a farm, as evidenced by statements such as:

*'I learnt how long and hard you have to work to grow vegetables and make milk'*

*'Growing apples is really expensive'*

*'I liked learning about how everything works, it's heaps more complicated than you would think'*



This awareness matches one hosts intention of the tour, which was to show students 'how their food is produced or where, and the challenge that some of us farmers have'.

Students were also impressed by the level of science and technology used on farms, as reflected in comments such as those below. These experiences provide students the opportunity to translate curriculum learnt in the classroom with real life applications on farm, especially subjects related to science, technology, engineering and/or maths (STEM).

*'It's so science based,  
like it's not very hands  
on'*

*'I was very surprised about  
how much science was  
involved in the food and  
fibre industry'*

*'I was surprised by the  
amount of technology that  
they use on a day-to-day  
basis on both the dairy farm  
and the orchard'*

The experience also helps to dispel the common myth that the food and fibre industry is just about being a farmer and showcases that the industry involves a whole range of roles and service providers. This insight also allowed students to consider a future in the industry, as evidenced by statements such as:

*'This has slightly changed  
my mind, I saw how they  
take care of the cows and  
stuff and I reckon it was  
pretty cool'*

*'I learnt about how working in  
the dairy industry isn't only  
about milking cows, there are  
way more opportunities that  
you can take part in'*

*'It was fun and interesting to  
learn about every and it also  
inspired me a bit and taught  
me about what they really  
do behind the scenes'*





# 2019 Agri-Tech Experience Roadshow Survey Results Summary

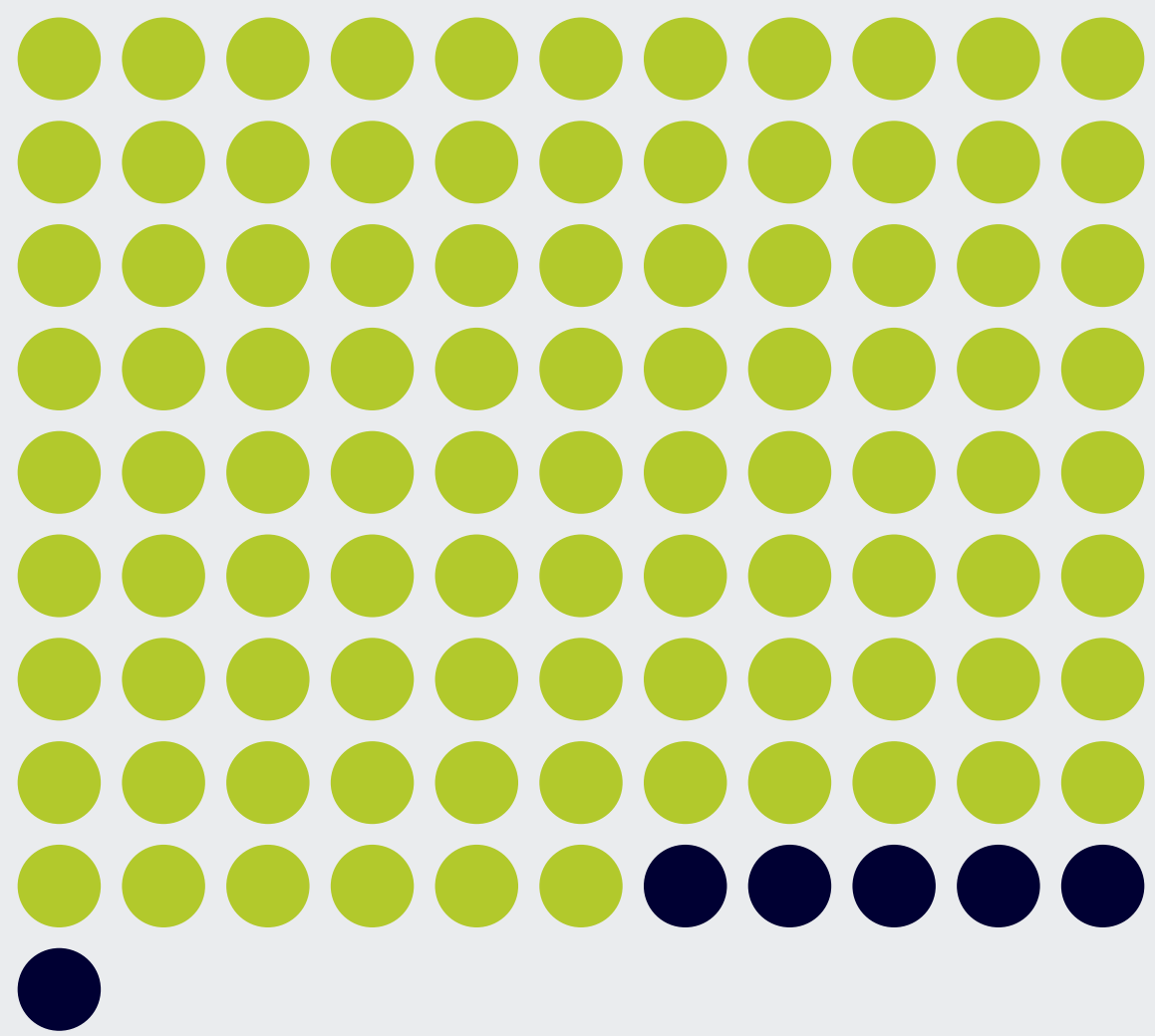
48

students completed the survey

7

teachers completed the survey

94% of students had a positive response to their experience



22%

enjoyed seeing animals

19%

were impressed with farming practices

50%

enjoyed the day generally



## THE HOSTS

The immersion hosts cited a range of reasons for wanting to be involved in hosting student farm visits, with the most prominent response being to provide education and awareness about the food and fibre industry (62% of all host responses). This included comments such as they enjoy showing people how they run their business, raising awareness about sustainable farming practices and connecting youth with agriculture who would not normally get to experience farm life. Hosts also mentioned the importance of creating awareness and interest in careers in the food and fibre industry as reasons for participating in the Immersion day (38%). Hosts recognised that the younger generation are the future of agriculture due to an ageing population of farmers, and thus are willing to volunteer their time to showcase the variety of career opportunities that exist to students.

**33%**

of hosts wanted to show where food comes from

**25%**

of hosts want to encourage students into the industry

**8%**

of hosts wanted to bring 'new blood' into ag



All six producers had been involved in hosting farm tours previously. Two of these mentioned they had found it difficult to initiate themselves, due to either not being able to find the time to arrange the event or a lack of interest from schools. Three respondents stated that being invited to participate worked well for them, saving them time contacting schools and organising the day.

All hosts enjoyed showing students their production system, commenting that the students enjoyed interacting with the animals and tasting the produce on offer, while they noted that students were unsure about the farms by-products, such as farm smells and cow manure, as well as external factors such as the heat. Three hosts stated they would like to include more hands-on activities in future tours, possibly even tailoring the day towards certain age groups or students that have an interest in the industry. One host reported they found it challenging to deliver information to students that had no knowledge or interest of the industry, as it required more effort to maintain their interest, although they found this a good challenge to take on.





Only one host agreed that an Immersion day provides students with enough information to consider a future career in agriculture, while four stated that it gives them a good introduction to the industry and provides an opportunity to learn about what happens on a farm, but there is plenty more that they can learn. None of the hosts reported learning anything new about students' perceptions of the industry, and considering they had all participated in student activities prior, this was not unexpected.



A main concern raised by the hosts was a lack of student understanding about where their food comes from. The Immersion day provided a great way to raise awareness about the processes involved in producing high quality food whilst caring for the animals and the environment. Students were impressed with the level of care observed on farms, where one student was impressed to learn about 'The way Australian farmers take care of our nutritious fruit, dairy and meats', which was similar the following comment made by another student after visiting an organic dairy farm, 'At the dairy I was surprised by how limited they were when it came to antibiotics and that sort of stuff. I didn't realise they would put so much effort into staying clean of chemicals and that sort of stuff.' They were also impressed by the importance placed on environmental sustainability, with comments such as 'It was good how they were environmentally safe', 'I liked how they had ways to grow crops that was safe to the environment,' and 'I liked the whole environmental sustainable system.'





Overall the Immersion day was well received by students, teachers and the hosts. All students reported learning something new on the day, which meets the hosts expectations and the reasons why they participate in such events; this is reflected by one host saying 'It gets them thinking', and another host stating 'Having them on the farm might tweak somebody's interest that they've never thought of anything like that before... and whether that doesn't come to fruition for 10 years, it's an experience that they've had that they can go back to. You just hope that they will get something out of it long term.'



When evaluating the day, most hosts had a good awareness about maintaining student interest and saw the need to include more hands-on activities to engage the students. This was the main feedback received from both students and teachers. Including student activities within a commercial business can be challenging, especially when bounded by a range of health and safety requirements that exist to keep workers and visitors safe on-farm. Hosts mentioned a lack of time for initiating events such as these themselves, thus including an added requirement to incorporate hands on activities may be detrimental to some hosts participating. The feasibility of the development of hands-on activities related to the food and fibre sector which the GIPPYAg project team could develop and deliver on-farm during Industry Immersion days should be looked into further. This could both ensure a more engaging experience for students, but also take the pressure of host farmers having to develop and deliver a half-day experience.

This research has highlighted a need to develop a best practice guide that provides producers with guidelines on hosting school tours, including information about engaging with students, modes of information delivery depending on student's year level and suggestions of potential interactive activities for a range of industries. This was recognised by one of the hosts who commented, 'Try and tailor the program to engage with how young kids operate... They love social media, give them an opportunity to take (selfies) promoting safe agriculture. I think the more we can give them that opportunity the better.'

One host also suggested the need to employ a facilitator who could represent the farms and the industry to lead the day, 'It's a massive burden on you and your time, and you know, we're happy to do it, but I think you'd get fatigued if you were being asked to do it all of the time,' they commented. This suggestion would also overcome a potential barrier of many farmers not being comfortable to talk in front of a crowd; having a dedicated person in charge of social engagement may encourage more farmers to participate as they would not be responsible for organising or delivering the entire event.



## CONCLUSION

A short-term industry engagement activity has proven to be an effective way of showcasing the food and fibre industry to high school students, who gained a great deal of knowledge about a range of industries. Students reported learning a new awareness about the way their food is produced and the effort and processes that are involved in growing quality produce; this outcome aligns with the hosts intentions for being involved in the day, which is a satisfying result for them to know that the time and effort they generously volunteered for the day was worthwhile.



Short term industry exposure was deemed via survey results as not being long enough for students to consider the industry as a career option. These experiences are still important as without exposure to the agriculture and horticulture sector, it is unlikely young people will develop knowledge of where their food and fibre comes from, or an interest in a future career in the industry. There are many benefits of the Industry Immersion program ranging from educating students on where their food comes, inspiring future industry ambassadors, generating knowledge that can be shared with their family and friends, to creating a memory that inspires future career options.

Ultimately, the day provided a great avenue for students to experience the wonders of farm life, leaving a positive and enjoyable impression on many of the students for years to come, with many commenting that they had a fun day, 'I liked everything about the farms and the farmers. It was a great experience with Gippsland farmers.'