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Let's start the conversation...

Classer Survey identifies issues to Attract, Train and Retain

Culture is the key when it comes to attracting, training and retaining wool harvesting staff. These are some of the findings of a survey of professional classers conducted by AWEX.

"The Australian wool industry's global reputation of having the best prepared wool in the world is due to the level of trained, skilled and experienced staff in the wool shed. The availability of trained and skilled staff is under increasing pressure and attracting the next generation of wool shed staff is a serious concern for the industry. What is pleasing is the increasing number of women working in the wool industry, at all levels, and this is a positive influence." said Mark Grave, AWEX CEO.

AWEX has 14,500+ registered wool classers; but for the past 15 years, approximately 500 wool classers every year have not renewed their registration. AWEX's survey was undertaken to explore what, factors might be influencing the steady decline in trained and registered wool classers.

The survey invited all professional classers and Masterclassers to have their say.

Pleasingly, a clear message from classers via the survey is that they are passionate and proud of the wool industry and the part they play in it. 95% would recommend the wool industry as an industry to pursue as a career.

However, a poor and unsafe workplace environment is impacting the industry's ability to attract and retain new staff. Classers identified key areas that detract from what is generally considered a positive environment.

- **Facilities:**

Inadequate and poorly maintained facilities impacting on shed safety was highlighted as a risk that must be addressed. Simple maintenance of the wool shed and WHS briefings before a shed starts would have an immediate and lasting impact on the wool shed work force and culture.

Providing secure toilets, showers & accommodation, lunch and wash-up facilities; regardless of the gender of the team, is a must to improve the wool shed environment.

- **Culture:**

The wool industry is not immune from general societal issues such as drugs & alcohol, harassment and bullying. Classers expressed concern that the industry must be proactive in meeting these challenges head on and address them in an ongoing atmosphere of support.

These issues require a united approach to ensure that the clear message of zero tolerance is supported across industry.

In undertaking this survey, AWEX is aware that the views expressed are from the perspective of the classer in the woolshed. The participants; however, reflect a fair representation of age, gender, experience and location to that of the national profile of Wool Classers.

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Maintaining a positive and safe culture in the wool shed is paramount to attracting new staff to the wool industry. Messages of zero tolerance are important to signal the level of concern and seriousness we, as an industry, have towards issues that impact the culture and future of the wool shed workforce.

It is imperative that these issues are discussed and acted upon. AWEX will be working with industry bodies and associations to develop awareness and structures to support and drive a positive culture and environment.

Background

AWEX received 356 responses, or 4.2%, of the 8,300 professional classers and Masterclasser cohort.

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