

From the classroom to the orchard



Students learn about the career pathways available right across the almond industry, from the orchard to the lab, processing facilities and beyond.

A new program is giving Northern Mallee students a hands-on opportunity to explore careers in the almond industry

THE Almond Board of Australia is supporting an initiative that gives secondary school aged students in Victoria's Northern Mallee region an opportunity to learn more about the career pathways and modern technology being used in the horticulture sector.

Chaffey Secondary College, Mildura Specialist School, Irymple Secondary College, Merbein P-10 College and Red Cliffs Secondary College are involved in the Northern Mallee Horticulture Immersion Program (NMHI Project).

As part of the nine-week program, students attend the Chaffey Secondary College farm on Fridays each week.

Some time is spent engaging in activities at the farm and learning in the classroom, but participants also get the opportunity to tour local horticulture properties, nurseries, research laboratories, processing facilities, smart farms and other related sites.

Pieter Van Zyl and Jane Finch from Select Harvests and Dr Zelmari Coetzee from Agriculture Victoria's SmartFarm have helped shine a light on the almond industry.

Chaffey Secondary College student Destiny French said she has enjoyed being involved in the program.

"One of the highlights for me was going to the almond visit and getting to know about the hulling and

different types of almonds," she said.

The Year 10 student said out of all the careers that were explored during the NMHI Project, being an agronomist looked the most appealing.

Chaffey Secondary College's executive principal Graeme Forrester said the economic impact the horticulture industry has in Sunraysia is significant.

"It's supporting every single person in this district," he said.

Mr Forrester said it was important to showcase the technology and skills that are needed to grow high quality crops.

"A few years ago, the National Skills Commission indicated it was probably one of the fastest growing industries,



Students visit the Chaffey Secondary College farm every Friday as part of a mix of on-farm and in classroom learning.

yet when you talk to so many people about agriculture and horticulture, they think it's about picking and packing, and there's actually a lot more than that," he said.

Mr Forrester would like Vocational Education and Training (VET) Agriculture and Horticulture to become available students in Year 10 and 11 and delivered at the Chaffey Secondary College farm. He said the school farm is in the centre of Mildura, making it very accessible. "We'd like to develop the farm and for it to be used for the whole town rather than just us, it's a great facility," Mr Forrester said.

Fifty students have participated in the program so far this year and another group will start the nine-week program in Term 4.

NMHI Project is led by the Northern Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network, in partnership with Chaffey Secondary College, regional secondary schools, community organisations and industry with funding from the Victorian Government's Secondary School Agriculture Fund supported by Agriculture Victoria.

“ When you talk to so many people about agriculture and horticulture, they think it's about picking and packing, and there's actually a lot more than that.

- Graeme Forrester
Chaffey Secondary College Executive Principal



Fifty students have participated in the farm so far this year, with another group starting in Term 4.