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Industry hopes to claim the ag college

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IT'S AN opportunity Central Queensland agriculture is determined not to miss, as Agforce demands training colleges at Emerald and Longreach be handed back to the industry.

In the hopes of an industry-led solution, AgForce believes the sites offer the potential to support profitable and sustainable agriculture in areas like carbon-neutral farming, drought mitigation, flora and fauna conservation, reef preservation and increased Indigenous and female participation.

The decision comes after the State Government's surprise decision to close both colleges, a move which drew widespread disbelief and outrage from producers and communities throughout rural Queensland.

AgForce General President Georgie Somerset says the colleges are too important to agriculture, and to the many rural and

regional communities that depend on agriculture, to allow them to be axed.

"We believe these are unique, irreplaceable assets and we are currently engaging with organisations and community groups around the State to elicit their support and ideas to save them," says Mrs Somerset.

"The response so far has been overwhelmingly in favour of an industry-led solution.

"AgForce's plan is to overhaul these institutions and the services they offer to form the backbone of a comprehensive, future-looking rural research and education system that offers benefits beyond agriculture," she said.

Mrs Somerset says this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for agriculture.

"AgForce strongly believes it is time for much-needed reform to the education and skills training available to rural Queenslanders, especially

agriculture-specific curriculum," she said.

"But the Government has thrown its hands in the air and, without any industry consultation, decided to close the colleges because they cannot make them relevant to the end user.

"We firmly believe that industry itself is best placed to oversee innovative, outcomes-focused research, education and skills training that will ensure broadacre agriculture continue to grow as a world leader."

Since the announcement on Monday (December 10) to overhaul the colleges,

Agforce has received support from prominent members around the region.

Federal Member for Flynn, Ken O'Dowd is urging the state government to take Agforce up on their offer.

"It is great news that AgForce will take up the challenge to keep these two college's open for business." Mr O'Dowd said.

"I call upon the State Labor Government to hand over the keys, write off the

debt to make way for a new operator to take control of this very valuable asset."

Minister for Agriculture David Littleproud has also supported the handover of the colleges.

"If Labor cut vital education services in Brisbane, people would be outraged," he said.

"This is the most callous act in living memory.

"Our farmers grow our food and without agricultural colleges, we don't have the next generation coming through to grow that food.

"Brisbane folk eat the food we grow them out here in country Queensland and we need them to fight for us on this one."



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PUSH: AgForce Queensland general president Georgie Somerset brought Ag Day to the city, addressing stallholders and customers of the Jan Powers farmers markets in Brisbane.

PHOTO: SARAH HENDERSON