MEDIA RELEASE

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Harvey Ag College students recognised for innovative climate-resilience ideas

Three Year 12 students from WA College of Agriculture - Harvey (WACOA Harvey) were recognised at their graduation ceremony for developing innovative solutions to climate-related challenges facing local producers.

Their projects were created as part of the Climate-Smart Innovation Challenge, facilitated by the Grower Group Alliance's South-West WA Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub (SW WA Hub).

The Challenge invites high school students to develop practical solutions for farming in a hotter, drier and more variable climate, focusing on issues affecting producers in their own region. This year, 32 students from WACOA Harvey participated.

First place was awarded to Paige Picton for her concept of an edible silage wrap made from algae rather than plastic. The idea could reduce plastic waste, improve livestock nutrition and help lower methane emissions.

“What I wanted to do was help farmers with their feed efficiency and nutritional value problems, as well as the plastic pollution throughout the soil and the limited yield they'll get from that plastic pollution,” Miss Picton said.

“Overall, it's about mitigating a lot of effects from [using plastic wraps], trying to make it more sustainable and more productive with a simple change.”

Second place went to Oscar Tozer, who investigated using specialised enzymes to improve compost quality and increase its value as an alternative to conventional fertilisers.

Oscar was interested in exploring this topic because of the current worldwide conflicts that are impacting farmers.

“It's a big issue you hear about every day. Nitrogen, fertilisers, urea and everything is being really diminished in quantities and availability to farmers. Farmers need to look at more organic nitrogen options,” Mr Tozer said.

Third place was awarded to Ben Dusenberg, whose concept uses drones and livestock movement to establish pasture crops, reducing reliance on heavy machinery while lowering soil compaction, costs and emissions.

“When I was home in Ireland, I helped a local dairy owner manage his dairy farm and he originally gave me the idea,” Mr Dusenberg said.

“There are trials being put in Europe right now that are using that idea of spreading the seed over the pasture and you use the livestock as a tool instead of tractors, which are very heavy with diesel emissions and greenhouse emissions.”

The Challenge has been integrated into the curriculum at WACOA Harvey.

Manager Farm Training Paul Dyson says students can get dismissed because of the view that they have limited real world experience.

“The reality is they are not preprogrammed in any way, so they are open to ideas, and their mind is a blank canvas,” Mr Dyson said.

“The Challenge allows them to develop their own thinking and response to issues they find when researching weather trends in our area over a long period of time.

“I am most impressed by the out-of-the-box ideas that our students have had. Some may need further development, but many have genuine potential for practical application.”

Acting Hub Director Tanya Kilminster said the quality of student work continued to improve each year.

“Since working with WACOA Harvey over the past four years, we've seen remarkable growth in research, critical thinking and innovation,” Ms Kilminster said.

“Each year, students continue to raise the bar, developing ideas that have genuine potential to be explored further and, in some cases, translated into real-world agricultural applications.”

The SW WA Hub, funded through the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund, is helping producers and regional communities prepare for the challenges of a warming, drying and more variable climate.

By encouraging young people to think creatively, test ideas and solve real-world problems, the Climate-Smart Innovation Challenge helps build the skills needed for a resilient agricultural future.

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Caption: Paige Picton, 17, from Perth, took first place with “The Nutri-Wrap” project.



Caption: Oscar Tozer,17, from Australind, took second place with the “Anaerobic Enzyme-Assisted Composting” project



Caption: Ben Dusenberg, 18, from Kalamunda, took third place with the “Eco-Pulp ‘Stomp Sync’ Pasture System” project.



Caption: Tanya Kilminster, Acting Director, South-West WA Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub

About the Grower Group Alliance and the South-West WA Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub

The Grower Group Alliance (GGA) is a thriving state-wide network of more than 95 member groups from across Western Australia, with a collective membership exceeding 4,000 farm enterprises.

The South-West WA Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub (SW WA Hub) was established in 2021 as one of eight Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hubs nationwide that form part of the extensive initiatives delivered via the federal Future Drought Fund aiming to help Australian farms and communities prepare for the impacts of drought.

As a major GGA-led project, the SW WA Hub leverages the GGA grower group network through a 'hub and spoke' model to promote ground-up innovation and help farmers enhance resilience to an increasingly variable climate in the South-West WA region.

Grower groups are among the SW WA Hub's more than 50 consortium partners, which represent all sectors of the WA agricultural supply chain and are providing cash and in-kind co-contributions to bring the project to life.

For full details visit the Hub project page: https://hub.gga.org.au/