

QUESTION ON NOTICE
No. 532
Asked on Thursday, 15 March 2007

MR HAYWARD asked the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries (MR MULHERIN)-

QUESTION:

How will the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries 2007 Hermitage Research Station Schools' Plant Science Competition encourage student interest in science and agriculture?

ANSWER:

The Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries' (DPI&F) Hermitage Research Station Schools' Plant Science Competition is part of a larger annual competition open to primary and high school students throughout Australia. The national competition has been running now for 10 years and has involved over 8 500 students during that time.

A different competition topic is selected each year and is designed to run in conjunction with Education Queensland's educational curricula. The aim is to provide hands-on opportunities for students to explore science and its application to agricultural environments and industries.

Over the past 10 years, a total of 431 schools have participated in the competition. This is providing opportunities for students to learn about issues such as water use efficiency in crops, managing grain storage pests, the importance of grain quality in meeting market requirements, managing insect pests in crops in an environmentally friendly manner and plant breeding to improve yield and quality of agricultural crops.

The competition gives students the opportunity to participate in a stimulating, hands-on science project relevant to current DPI&F research and which supports the "working scientifically" framework. Students conduct experiments, analyse their findings and discuss these in relation to current issues affecting agriculture today such as coping with variable climate, the need to increase productivity and reduce chemical use and better meet consumer requirements.

Children obtain a better understanding of the issues facing Australian farmers and agricultural produce exporters and become more aware of the importance of maintaining and developing future markets for Queensland businesses.

DPI&F provides full support to competition participants through school visits and general communications, thus strengthening relationships between the community, Education Queensland/schools and DPI&F scientists and staff.

An annual Presentation Day is held at the Hermitage Research Station to formally recognise competition winners. After official proceedings, a tour of the research station takes place where students and teachers learn more about current research projects and inspect agricultural research facilities such as glasshouses and crop trials.

A broad range of agricultural science studies and careers are promoted to students by DPI&F staff during school visits and the annual Presentation Day.

Children get to meet DPI&F scientists first-hand and listen to inspiring, educational speeches about their careers, studies and the exciting world of science.