

Media Release

The Hon Gayle Tierney MP
Minister for Skills and TAFE
Minister for Water



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TAFE STUDENTS GET SMART WITH FARMING IN SUNRAYSIA

Horticulture students in Sunraysia are growing almonds and avocados by working smarter, not harder, with support from the Allan Labor Government.

Minister for Skills and TAFE Gayle Tierney today officially opened the redeveloped SuniTAFE SMART Farm campus in Cardross, made possible by a \$3.9 million investment from the Labor Government.

The Labor Government's \$2 million investment to upgrade facilities such as a new potting shed with automated seeding and potting machines, a modular farm for controlled climate cropping with hydroponics, new irrigation systems, and upgraded hydraulic valves.

More crops have been planted including patches of almonds, olives, table grapes, citrus and avocados, further cementing Sunraysia's renowned reputation as Australia's horticultural food bowl.

In addition, SuniTAFE received \$1.9 million through the Agriculture TAFE and Training Fund for its 'Protective Cropping – Building an Industry Workforce' project. This initiative supports training in protected cropping through a Certificate II in Protected Horticulture, delivered via the SMART Farm training facility.

With the region's economy largely driven by horticulture and other agriculture, there is strong demand for skilled workers who have hands-on experience with precision farming and digital technologies.

SuniTAFE's upgraded SMART Farm training and innovation campus gives students the opportunity to work with industry and researchers on projects in horticulture, conservation, precision farming and business management, while industry partners can also use the farm to test new crops, technology and processes.

SMART farming combines traditional practices with modern technology such as robots, drones and autonomous equipment to make farming more productive, efficient and sustainable.

The Labor Government is making sure all Victorians can get the skills they need for jobs they want. Through Free TAFE, students can access more than 80 qualifications and short courses without the cost of tuition fees, including the Certificate III in Production Horticulture.

Since 2019, more than 200,000 students have benefitted from Free TAFE, including over 50,000 in regional Victoria—saving them more than \$600 million in tuition fees.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Skills and TAFE Gayle Tierney

"Free TAFE is a key part in the investment in training, especially in regional Victoria, we're removing financial barriers to ensure Victorians can get the training they need to get reliable jobs that lead to rewarding careers."

"There is enormous potential to have a rewarding career in modern agriculture and horticulture – training at SuniTAFE's innovative SMART Farm will give Victorians the best start."

Quote attributable to Minister for Agriculture Ros Spence

"This investment in SuniTAFE's SMART Farm is equipping the next generation of farmers with the skills and technology needed to boost productivity and sustainability in Victoria's thriving horticulture sector."

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Quote attributable to Member for Northern Victoria Jaclyn Symes

“Our investment in SuniTAFE’s SMART Farm is giving local students hands-on experience with the latest technology, ensuring they graduate with the skills needed to drive innovation in Sunraysia’s vital horticulture industry.”

Quotes attributable to SuniTAFE Chief Executive Officer Brett Millington

‘We are delighted to welcome the Minister to our SMART Farm campus and formally open the significant modernisation process that we have undertaken over the last 12 months.’

“These works will not only help us to train the workforce of today for our Agricultural and Horticultural industries, but also inspire the next generation by experiencing firsthand the future of growing food for our nation.