

Speech from Patrick Redden
2017 Jim McColl AIA Young Consultant Awardee.

I would like to thank the Ag Institute for the Jim McColl AIA Young Consultant Award. Unfortunately I never met Jim, but in researching the award have seen his substantial career profile and it is an honour to receive an award named in his honour.

I noticed when reading about Jim that in his consulting he had a strong focus on financial management as well as production, in order for clients to be profitable. This certainly rings true today and is something that I believe is critical in providing sound advice to clients. He also was very conscious of having sound scientific grounding for policy decisions in his later government roles, and again this is something that is perhaps more critical than ever in today's agricultural policy environment as we continue to debate the merits of GM's.

I have been working at Rural Directions Pty Ltd as a private consultant for 13 years now, and during this time have come to realise that whilst technical knowledge and facts and figures are important, it is being able to listen to, understand and build strong relationships with clients that can be the real drivers of change. Rural Directions has some senior consultants that are very strong in this area and have been a great example to follow.

The nature of technology and ag is always changing, and one of the biggest changes I have noticed in the last few years is the rise of Twitter as a way of sharing information amongst the ag community. This has resulted in very fast transfer of ideas and discussion across state and even international borders.

Farmers are now interacting far beyond their local saleyards or pub, whether with other farmers or researchers, and this is stimulating rapid adoption of change for those that are prepared to have a go. It also means that there can be a lot more scope for misinterpretation or poorly adapted ideas to be taken up out of context. So whilst information is flowing in a different way, there remains a role for consultants and advisers with strong local knowledge and scientific understanding to help clients sort the 'wheat from the chaff' with so much information available.

Finally I would like to again thank the McColl family and the Institute for the award and supporting younger consultants, Rural Directions for providing me with numerous mentors, opportunities and career development, and most importantly our clients, without whom we don't exist.