(Left) To achieve the $100 billion industry goal by 2030 set by National Farmers Federation in 2018, the agricultural industry needs to embark on a digital transformation journey.

PREPARING AUSTRALIAN AGRICULTURE FOR
A DIGITAL FUTURE

The *Growing a digital future for Australian agriculture* project is a collaboration between the **Cotton Research and Development Corporation, Meat and Livestock Australia, Dairy Australia, Sugar Research Australia, AgriFutures Australia, Australian Wool Innovation, Horticulture Innovation Australia, Australian Pork Limited, Wine Australia, Fisheries Research and Development Corporation and Australian Egg Corporation Limited with research providers Griffith University, University of the Sunshine Coast, CSIRO and KPMG.**

Australia stands at the precipice of improved agricultural output through the adoption of digital agriculture, but what is required to kick-start and navigate the process to capitalise on this future prosperity?

The recent Growing a Digital Future in Agriculture National Forum held at Parliament House, Canberra in September brought stakeholders from government, education, agriculture, research and policy together to address the opportunities, challenges and actions needed to allow Australian farmers, foresters and fishers to transform their businesses, livelihoods, supply chains and industries.

While agricultural digital technologies are already well advanced and available in the marketplace, research has revealed that adoption and utilisation remains low across the industry. This is due to many factors, not least a lack of human capability, knowledge and understanding of what digital agriculture is.

To achieve the $100 billion industry goal by 2030 set by National Farmers Federation in 2018, the agricultural industry needs to embark on a digital transformation journey. This journey began in earnest at the national forum.

The forum marked the release of two practical tools to help Australian agri-businesses adopt digital technologies in a way that adds value to their farming business.

1. THE AUSTRALIAN AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE DIGITAL CAPABILITY FRAMEWORK AND SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

This tool provides the analysis and framework for education providers to develop a curriculum to meet future demand for digital skills in the agriculture industry.

This framework better enables the Australian tertiary and VET sectors to develop and deliver courses valuable for industry and helps individuals decide on the myriad of courses available online globally from learning platforms.

Achieving a practical national framework will also guide ongoing investments and priorities as they relate to up-skilling the agricultural workforce to better adopt technology and lift the digital maturity of the sector.

2. THE AUSTRALIAN AGRICULTURE DIGITAL MATURITY INDEX AND SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

To ensure that the journey of digital transformation is purposeful and effective, it is important to first undertake an assessment of the industry to identify areas of digital strength and areas for development.

The development of the on-line digital maturity index and assessment tool is considered a useful first step for digital transformation. CSIRO has developed a world-first digital maturity index and assessment tool specifically for agriculture, which encompasses five key pillars.

The tool can serve a diagnostic and monitoring and evaluation function for digital transformation. It helps agribusinesses and individual agriculture sectors to evaluate their current levels of digital maturity, identify areas of strength and weakness, as well as assist them in setting goals, and in developing and evaluating targeted digital-improvement initiatives.

Ultimately, this assessment could help the agriculture industry develop a systematic digital strategy that, by design, should transform the industry from one that is ad hoc, to one that is purposeful and impactful.

The national forum was led by CRDC's Innovation Manager Jane Trindall.

"This is a simple to use self-assessment tool which can be used by anyone really in agriculture to get a very quick snapshot of how well their business is prepared for digital technologies and where you can spend time and investment in improving", she said.

WHAT IS A DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION?

Peter Alexander (Chief Digital Officer, Australian Government) addressed the forum with an interesting take on the term 'digital transformation', describing it by saying "it's really just 'transformation', technology is important but it is an enabler.

"What is required for the transformation is rethinking how you are going to deliver your products and services in the future," he said.

"This requires looking at your business in a greenfield way – what would you do (on farm) if you didn't have a legacy, if you could start from scratch, what would you want and what would that look like?" ∎