

RURAL AMBASSADORS

Statement

HON JACKIE JARVIS (South West — Minister for Agriculture and Food) [6.15 pm]: I rise this evening to speak about the Rural Ambassador competition, a national competition that is proudly sponsored in Western Australia by the Royal Agricultural Society of WA. It is a competition for young adults from rural areas who have a passion for living and working in their rural and regional communities. The competition aims to discover the next generation of rural leaders who want to represent and promote their region and the state. This year, 25-year-old Reece Jerrett, from Serpentine Jarrahdale, was named as our National Rural Ambassador in the Australian competition, while 26-year-old Lauren Patane from the south west was recognised as WA's Rural Ambassador.

President, I would like to thank you for welcoming our guests to the President's gallery. I acknowledge and welcome Reece and Lauren, together with their guests, Anne Stroud, vice president of the Royal Agricultural Society of WA, and Julianne Hill, president of the Brunswick Agricultural Society. They are accompanied by their local members, the members for Darling Range and Murray-Wellington. Welcome.

Reece and Lauren both faced tough judging panels to beat out impressive competition to secure their titles. They now plan to use their voices and lived experience to advocate for Western Australia's farming sector, making sure that rural residents feel seen and heard. As part of their roles, Reece and Lauren will travel around the country meeting state and federal decision-makers as well as leaders in agriculture and education, and will ask the hard questions and provide important points of view on a range of topics. I look forward to sitting down with both of them this evening and listening to what they have to say. As a rural resident myself, I know that the elevation of strong rural voices is incredibly important.

Reece is, as I said, the National Rural Ambassador. Reece Jerrett is passionate about bringing issues to the fore to protect agricultural communities. He believes that one of the biggest issues impacting the rural way of life is urban sprawl. He is also keen to promote fresh produce grown in the Serpentine Jarrahdale area and promote the fact that it is an important peri-urban area that supplies food to the Perth region. He lives and breathes what he preaches. He is the president of the Serpentine Jarrahdale Food and Farm Alliance, a group intent on preserving the rural status of the area and supporting local producers through education and economic opportunities. If I can give anyone some advice, I highly recommend they get up to the Serpentine Jarrahdale Farmers' Market, which is outstanding and probably among the best farmers' markets that I have seen in the state. Do not tell the people at Margaret River Farmers' Market that I said that.

Reece's work on raising the profile of young producers has helped earn him the honour of the Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale's young citizen of the year in 2023. He is also well known in agricultural circles for breeding exhibition poultry and water fowl and is active in preserving the genetics of some of these really interesting poultry across the state. He is also president of the West Australian Poultry Association. I am advised that Reece has been volunteering for the Royal Agricultural Society of WA since he was eight years old and he says that this ambassadorship feels natural. He was recently elected to the Shire of Serpentine Jarrahdale, representing the south ward of the shire, and is looking forward to bridging the gap between peak bodies, politicians and the community, as well as championing the importance of local food security within Australia and the importance of the reducing food miles.

Now I turn to Lauren. Reece was previously the WA Rural Ambassador and has now won the national award, but he has passed the baton of the WA Rural Ambassador to Lauren. Lauren plans to share her love of horticulture with the nation to raise the profile of food wastage, particularly produce that does not even leave the farm. She wants to raise the profile of the horticulture industry and educate people on how it has evolved. She understands that many people may not even realise where their food comes from. Lauren is a fourth-generation farmer and is the operations manager at the family farming business in Myalup. For those members who drive down south regularly, the Patane property is on the right-hand side near the Crooked Carrot. They have been farming there since her great-grandfather migrated from Italy in the 1920s. If members have ever driven past it, they will have seen that they grow carrots, onions, broccoli and potatoes. They have established export chains to Asia and the Middle East. I really want to congratulate their farming enterprise. It tackles food waste by ensuring that they feed unsaleable produce to the family's 300 head of cattle.

Lauren is certainly making her own mark on the family business and, indeed, on an industry that has traditionally been dominated by men. I am told that as a teenager, Lauren worked on the farm in her spare time, because that is what people have to do when they run a family farming business, but she completed her ATAR at Bunbury Cathedral Grammar School and then completed a Bachelor of Science and a Bachelor of Commerce at the University of Western Australia. She credits her parents, Pennie and Michael, for giving her confidence and support and, indeed, a job in the family farming business.

It is incredibly important that these regional voices are heard. I was really impressed to read what Reece and Lauren have been doing in their day-to-day jobs but also how they are representing WA agriculture at a national level. The Western Australian agriculture industry contributed around \$24 billion to the state economy last year. It supports more than 52 000 jobs and creates exports worth more than \$15 billion per annum. It is the dedication, drive and passion of these young people that will help elevate agriculture across our state.