



Royal Agricultural Society of NSW



MEDIA RELEASE

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RAS FOUNDATION ANNOUNCES 2012 RURAL JOURNALISM SCHOLAR

A passion for journalism and a desire to promote rural affairs within Australia were key to third-year university student Alison Francis winning the 2012 JB Fairfax Award for Rural Journalism.

Alison, a Journalism student at the University of Queensland, is the fourth winner of the annual award – an initiative of the Royal Agricultural Society of NSW Foundation (RASF).

Born in the small Central Queensland town of Monto, Alison grew up on a cattle property. The 20 year-old credits this upbringing and lifestyle as being the primary catalyst for her interest in rural affairs.

Alison said receiving the award came somewhat as a surprise to her.

"I am determined to use my degree as a way to bridge the divide between city and country, by highlighting the stories of rural and regional Australia," Ms Francis said.

"I am so grateful to be able to represent the RASF, particularly in its endeavors to recognise the pivotal role of agriculture in our country. I believe that our rural and regional centres are vital to the well-being of Australia, and their safeguarding is a national priority."

It was Alison's drive to bring rural affairs to the forefront of Australian media that inspired her to submit her feature article, *Refugee problem becomes solution for regional employer*, in the 2012 JB Fairfax Award.

Alison's quest for a good story, her writing ability, attention to detail and enthusiasm for rural issues impressed the panel of judges, especially Fairfax Media Agricultural Publishing's representative Vernon Graham.

Mr Graham said this year's three finalists were all outstanding candidates with the potential to make a real difference in regional and rural media and to the lives of country people.

"Alison's enthusiasm, personality, humour, intelligence and love of rural Australia shone like a beacon that attracted and delighted all the judges," Mr Graham said.

The JB Fairfax Award for Rural Journalism was established to encourage quality coverage of rural and regional affairs by Australian journalists. It was created through a private donation by RASF Chairman Mr John B Fairfax AO and is managed by the RASF.

Mr Fairfax AO says it is important to nurture the future voices of Australian agriculture and ensure quality coverage of rural and regional affairs by Australian journalists.

"It is pleasingly apparent that there are many young people studying journalism who are passionate about rural and regional Australia and the part it plays in everyone's lives.

"I am confident that by supporting a scholarship of this nature we will be able to attract good writers to maintain and improve the quality of our rural reporting. Understanding the important issues and encouraging debate is an essential part of our democratic process."

Alison will receive a scholarship of \$10,000 and practical work experience at Rural Press and the 2012 Sydney Royal Easter Show. Her article, as well as being featured in *RAS Times*, will also be published in a major rural publication.

The RASF is a philanthropic foundation which seeks to encourage educational excellence and foster sustainable rural and regional communities by supporting quality youth community programs.

Visit www.rasf.org.au for more information on the RASF.

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