

▶▶ TERTIARY COURSES

Ag digs in on uni

By PETER HUNT

AGRICULTURAL educators have called on rural industries to follow the mining sector's lead and invest in university courses to revive student enrolments.

Australian Council of Deans of Agriculture president Rick Roush said rural industries and food processors had to get involved in promoting and funding the education of their future workforce.

Mr Roush said the mining industry's model had been highly successful and that the deans were examining how it could be used in agriculture.

Like agriculture, the mining industry faces a massive skills shortage.

In 1999, the Minerals Council

of Australia established a subsidiary — the Minerals Tertiary Education Council — to deal with the shortage.

The council's strategy was to offer universities incentive payments of \$10,000 for each graduate mining engineer.

Council chief executive Gavin Lind said the program had doubled the number of mining engineering graduates, though the industry still needed another 350 graduates a year.

Mr Lind said the mining industry was very similar to agriculture in battling to overcome myths about working in dusty, dirty isolated environments.

As a consequence the council has invested in the website miningcareers.com.au, which includes career paths, work ex-

perience opportunities, student blogs and salary details.

The education council relies on the Mineral Council's 200 corporate members for the \$4 million a year required to cover incentive payments to universities and travel bursaries for post-graduate students.

But the agricultural education sector faces a much tougher challenge trying to gain support from its diverse range of industries.

In the Victorian Parliament's recent inquiry into agricultural education, La Trobe University reported that fewer than 700 agriculture graduates were entering the national workforce annually to meet the demand for more than 4000 positions.

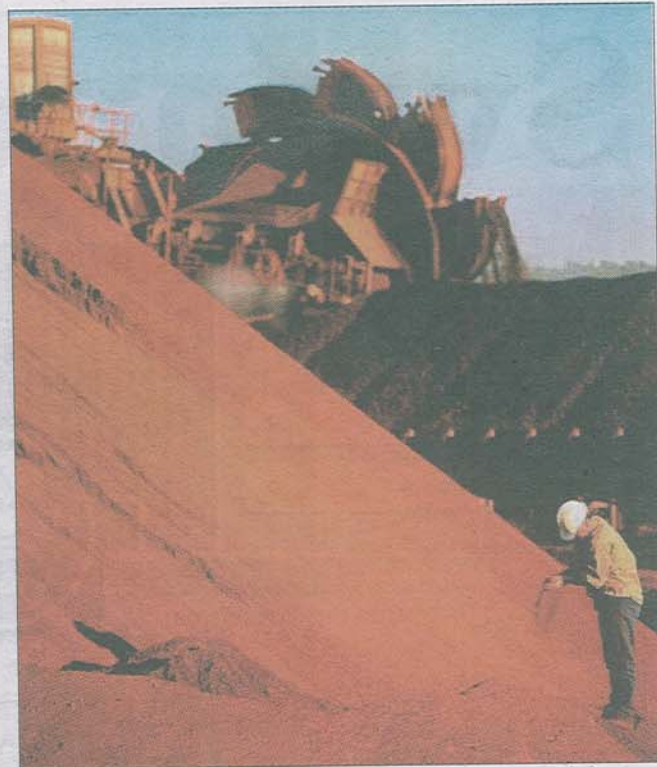
"The number of students en-

rolling in agricultural-based courses at universities in Victoria, and across Australia, is declining," the La Trobe submission stated.

"This is attributed to a negative image of agricultural careers. Careers in agriculture require promotion."

It recommended the establishment of an Agriculture Tertiary Education Council to foster the education of professionals for the industry.

An agriculture education council would support rural industry education and career initiatives and other related careers for graduates across a network of university partners, the submission said. It would be paid for by industry through subscriptions or levies.



Funding pile: Agricultural educators want rural industries to follow the mining sector's lead in investing in university courses.