

SE news
HD **Mercy saved**
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After being approved for demolition last year, the old Mercy Care Hospital has been given a new lease on life, boosting industry and education in Young in the process.

In a coup for the town, the **site** has been **sold** to investors to establish a college for agricultural education.

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A joint venture partnership between Australian and **Chinese** investors exchanged contracts for the **purchase** of the historic **site** on Tuesday, Roz Faulkner from Jamieson Real **Estate** announced yesterday.

The **group** said all the buildings on the **site** will be retained, including the old hospital, and they would be mindful of the historical significance of them.

The new college, called the Australia Agriculture Academy, aims to make Young a centre of innovative agricultural education, creating future leaders of agriculture in Australia.

Chairperson for the academy Dr John Troughton said they had big plans, aiming to cater not just to locals but to attract international students from Asia.

He said they had been looking for a **site** to launch the academy and the vacant Mercy Care Centre was a perfect fit.

"We were looking for a rural area" the facilities there are already half made and there's also accommodation," Dr Troughton said.

"We had explored Camden, in Wollondilly but it's still very much a city environment, we were looking for a rural environment to build education for rural children so we didn't have to teach them basics of agriculture, they already know it."

Dr Troughton said they aimed to be offering short courses to primary and secondary students by the end of the school year, before introducing longer courses for post high school students, both locally and internationally.

"It's just the start of the journey," he said.

"There will be a period where activities will be minimal as the college develops and buildings are upgraded to the right quality."

Dr Troughton said the college would create global opportunities for Young, putting the town on the map as an agricultural hub.

"We see it from Young's point of view as strengthening and expanding the already good educational institutions in Young, we're adding value to what's already there, including potential for locals to get involved," he said.

"It's also possible to really develop agro tourism, making Young a destination for tourism and events which we can build around the college."

Often seen as at a disadvantage to their city peers, Dr Troughton said the college will give rural students an unprecedented chance to engage in agricultural science.

It will focus on exploring new and innovative technologies such as 3D printers, drones, minecraft, utilisation of Lego and Lego robotics, precision agriculture and GPS technology.

"We have the potential to lift the capacity of rural children above city children," he said.

"Hopefully Young will be seen as a leader, agricultural examples are at their back door to advance their education and learn their science behind it."

He said the college will focus on linking students to experts worldwide.

"Because of changes in technology, the opportunity is there to become involved with international centres of excellence like Cornell University, Stamford and the Punjabi Agricultural College in India, whereby we can get better knowledge of international markets," Dr Troughton said.

"We plan to utilise social media which will provide us with world class topics run by world class leaders, brought to Young through the Internet.

"It will also allow us to have direct communication through regional NSW."

After months of uncertainty over the future of the **site**, the news was the best possible outcome for local heritage consultant Joseph Kinsela.

Not only will the **site** be preserved, but it has the possibility of facilitating a thriving industry for Young.

"It's the very best thing to have made use of it, people will be thrilled to hear the outcome," he said.

"There was a huge groundswell of support from the community following the council's decision last year."

Mr Kinsela said the **site**, built in 1910, was the first Catholic hospital ever built in NSW, outside of metropolitan areas.

"I just hope they get a good heritage study done and fully restore the old hospital," he said.

Dr Troughton's interest in developing rural education do not stop at the agricultural College.

He is focused on continuing regional minded education programs and hopes to help establish a culinary academy focusing on using local produce.

"If not precisely in young, we'd like to see a culinary academy," he said.

"We would also associate with it the use of local fruit and vegetables and served to people to demonstrate not only how they are produced, but best way to use them."

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