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5 October 2007

## Nuffield scholarship for Elizabeth Town cheese producer

Cheese producer Jane Bennett from Elizabeth Town, Tasmania, will tonight be awarded Australia's leading farming scholarship, a Nuffield Australia Farming Scholarship.

Ms Bennett is one of only 16 Australians to receive a 2007 Nuffield Scholarship. She will be presented with her award tonight at the Innovative Farming Australia awards dinner, part of the Nuffield Australia Spring Tour being held in Fremantle, WA.

Nuffield Farming Scholarships, each worth \$25,000, give young Australian farmers the opportunity to travel internationally and explore agricultural issues and opportunities in a global context. There are about 1300 Nuffield scholars worldwide.

Ms Bennett will use her scholarship, sponsored by Rabobank, to investigate trends in regional product development and branding point of difference. She will also explore distribution channels, particularly innovative systems, for regional produce.

"Government-funded studies have identified branded Tasmanian produce as the key market opportunity for the state's farmers, however a lack of brand integrity standards and the absence of a coordinated plan to bring produce to market remain major impediments," Ms Bennett says. "Developing a strategy to build a values-based brand identity for new markets is integral to improving farm gate values and creating a viable future for family farming operations."

Ms Bennett is the Managing Director of Ashgrove Cheese, a market leader in the national specialty cheese sector. Established in 1993 to add value to milk produced on the Bennett family farming enterprise, Ashgrove Farms, Ashgrove Cheese currently consumes 40 per cent of the farm's total milk production. A significant expansion underway will result in a major shift into export markets to build volume sales.

"The most cost-effective way to develop export market opportunities is to combine shipments with other produce to build critical mass," Ms Bennett says. "The development of a Tasmanian regional produce brand that meets market expectations will facilitate product consolidation for transportation and establish an 'on-shelf' presence.

Ms Bennett has also won a place on the Worshipful Company of Farmers' Advanced Course in Agricultural Business Management. Only one Nuffield scholar can attend the three-week course which will take place at the Centre for European Agricultural Studies' Wye campus, UK, in January 2008.

Nuffield Australia CEO Mr Jim Geltch says many Nuffield Scholars go on to become active leaders in agriculture and the community. "For many, the scholarship experience changes their lives by opening their eyes to the wider world and giving them the confidence to pursue their goals," Mr Geltch says.

The 16 2007 Australian Nuffield Scholars will leave Australia in either February or June 2008 for a compulsory Global Focus Program. This will involve travel to China, North America, South America and Europe investigating agricultural marketing and trade issues, environmental issues and experiencing the different social and cultural aspects of each region.

Following the initial six-week program, the scholars will go their individual ways to pursue specific study programs in the country or countries of their choice. Ms Bennett hopes to travel to North America, Great Britain and New Zealand.

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