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Nuffield scholarship for Amiens vegetable grower

Vegetable grower Timothy Harslett from Amiens, Queensland, will tonight be awarded Australia's leading farming scholarship, a Nuffield Australia Farming Scholarship.

Mr Harslett is one of only 16 Australians to receive a 2007 Nuffield Scholarship. He will be presented with his 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.

Mr Harslett will use his scholarship to investigate integrated crop management and mechanical harvesting. The scholarship is funded by the National Vegetable Levy and sponsored by Horticulture Australia Limited in partnership with AUSVEG.

Mr Harslett believes integrated crop management is under-used in the Australian horticulture industry, particularly in relation to disease and weed management. "Mechanical harvesting also presents opportunities for efficiency improvements; labour costs constitute one-third of our total expenses and that figure has climbed steadily for years," he says.

Mr Harslett part-owns and manages a commercial vegetable operation at Amiens, near Stanthorpe, with major crops including celery, Chinese cabbage, cos lettuce and broccolini. He is confident that an industry-wide focus on integrated crop management will help producers grow better crops with lower input costs and positive environmental outcomes.

"Disease and weed management, and its relationship to soil health, is not fully understood in this industry. By engaging with experts internationally, I hope to gain a better insight that will enable me and other vegetable producers to implement smarter, more sustainable practices," Mr Harslett says.

Mr Harslett has also won a place on the Challenge of Rural Leadership course, a 13-day course developed by the Worshipful Company of Farmers, the Duchy College and the University of Plymouth. Only one Nuffield scholar can attend the course which this year will run from 4-17 November in south Devon.

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. Mr Harslett hopes to travel to Europe, the US, South America and New Zealand.

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