



**The Worshipful Company of Farmers – the 63<sup>rd</sup> course.**

**Agricultural Business Management Course 2014.**

19<sup>th</sup> January to 7<sup>th</sup> February 2014

Royal Agricultural University, Cirencester, Gloucestershire UK.

**Report for Nuffield Australia.**

Sponsors: Fairport Technologies, Western Australia



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My personal Nuffield Sponsor:



## **The Worshipful Company of Farmers Course – Stimulating the development of agricultural education.**

I was delighted to have been awarded the sponsored delegate position on the course for 2014. I am ever so grateful to my sponsors for their support, which was a huge help in getting me to England for the course. Our business has been using Fairport Technologies Mapping Software with GPS capability since its inception and continue to receive upgrades etc. since then. Thankyou to Roger Weise and the Fairport Team for allowing me the opportunity to attend the course. I am looking forward to continuing association with your company, who are leaders in Ag Software and Mapping Technology. A big thankyou to Chontell Gianni, from Jetset Travel who covered the cost of my airfares to the UK, once again, you did a fabulous job in organizing my flights and all the additional requirements...it is comforting to have such a close working relationship with you, which makes international travel arranging a breeze.

The course was a residential course at the beautiful Royal Agricultural University at Cirencester, and is surrounded by beautiful grounds and farms, in what is a busy part of England.

Professor John Alliston and Rita Walsh co-ordinated the course for the 3 weeks and logistics was managed by Rhonda Thompson. All three are members of the teaching community at RAU.22 participants attended the course and with 4 international scholars, it provided an interesting dynamic. There were 1 Kiwi, 1 German and 1 Spanish and myself as the token female and Aussie!! The remainder consisted of 2 Scottish and 16 English delegates. Varying agricultural experiences made the course interesting, with arable farmers, horticulture, beef and lamb producers, dairy farmers, turf, consulting and contracting enterprises represented. At our final presentation to the Worshipful Company representatives on completion of the course, it was ascertained that the 22 attendees collectively managed 160,000 acres, employed 184 people and had a combined turnover of £110m...a fair influence, particularly in the UK context.



**Photo 1** The photograph is of the attendees at the 63rd course with representatives of the Worshipful Company of Farmers, including Baroness Byford, current Master of the Worshipful Company. Master of Worshipful Company of Farmers, Baroness Byford, the 3<sup>rd</sup> women to be appointed Master since the inception of the Company.

The course commenced on arrival on the Sunday night with Psychometric Testing, conducted in order for delegates to gain an understanding of themselves and how other delegates process information... it was a great ice-breaker and conversation starter. Getting to know the other delegates was easy, as there were 4 Nuffield Scholars and one Nuffield Arden Scholar in the group and as usual, banter flowed freely from the start! I knew 2 of the UK delegates as one was a 2012 scholar (Robert Hodgkins) whom I had attended the Contemporary Scholars conference in the Netherlands and UK in 2013 and John Wildman, husband of Heather Wildman, another 2012 scholar.

The course program was quickly established and we were into it from Monday morning until completion 3 weeks later. Case Study analysis, panel and individual speakers formed the basis of learning for the course with plenty of time for interaction with the speakers at the end of sessions and generally at dinner at night, as the lecturers were invited to join the formal meals with attendees at the college.

The calibre and intellect of the expert speakers was exceptional, which for me, at times was a little daunting!!! I was suitably humbled many a time, with the knowledge sharing and openness of the speakers. The list of speakers was extensive, with industry leaders and corporate agricultural specialists. Particular interest to me, were the industry leaders who had succeeded in building brilliant business, and their frank accounts on how they achieved success were inspirational.

5 businesses were selected by majority vote, as part of the case study learning conducted by Prof John Alliston. I was lucky to be selected as one of the business case studies to be scrutinized by the group. Being questioned intensely about the intricacies of my business and how it operates by peers, whom my contact was just 'days' since starting the course, was a new confronting experience, which on reflection, was good practise for future situations whereby banks, boards and other stakeholders could potentially do the same thing. Discussions were held throughout the three weeks with sessions on how to improve business performance, manage growth, conduct board meetings and leadership challenges.

Field trips to exceptional farms were a highlight and a chance to have a look at the countryside. We were blessed to have open and honest discussions with the farm owners and managers about their business goals and visions and why they operate the way they do.

Rob Napier from Australia presented an interactive session on Agricultural Management around the world. It was nice to have a compatriot that had the same accent as myself!!!

Being a residential course, the ability to reflect with participants after lectures finished in the evening was very helpful in extending the insights of the group. The importance of staying on campus to facilitate continued debate on topics was as powerful as being involved in the scheduled sessions.

I hope that by having 4 international participants, the UK based scholars got some value from our differing perspectives and how Agriculture operates in our respective countries. Some of the messages I came away with were:

- In business, the rear-view mirror is much clearer than the windscreen -Nik Johnson
- Managers don't just manage the Status Quo, they should be improving your business.
- Obstacles are those frightening things that you see when you take your eyes off the goal – Henry Ford
- Leadership is the capacity to translate vision into reality – Warren Bennis
- It is better to succeed with the help of others, than to fail by yourself.
- Get the ratio of “price point : risk” right
- The key to scaling up is the quality of management.

The second weekend of the course was free to return home for the UK delegates and I was fortunate to be invited to Scotland to visit with the Wilson and Wildman Families. I was able to experience Pheasant shooting in true Scottish weather, with pretty much continuous rain, during the time spent outdoors. In fact, the entire time I was in England, there was only 2 occasions that it wasn't raining... on separate days for about 20 minutes each time. The course was conducted during the time that England suffered some of the heaviest and unrelentless rain in history, with parts of Somerset underwater for the entire time that I was in England.



**Photo 2. Farm visit to a diversified enterprise, discussing on ground operations, anaerobic digesters, yields and strategy with farm manger. An uncommon sight in Northern Australia; Farmers wearing rubber boots!! Even Rarer are farmers/graziers wearing berets...not an Akubra in sight!!**

A self-directed session on being bankable chaired by a course delegate was interesting, Australian farmers have a considerably different view to risk and debt. Needless to say, Aussies and Kiwis are fairly liberal and relaxed with high debt loads!!

The meals provided by the RAU were more than adequate, were 3 course with full wait service every night. The formal setting for meals added opportunity to meet with speakers individually and rotate dinner companions which ensured that we connected with all delegates. This has since created a close knit group whom regularly keep in contact, despite our distance and diverse business and personal situations. I have since travelled back to the UK for our group's first reunion in June 2014, which was insightful, with a delegate hosting an extensive farm visit, formal evening meal with speakers and a game of cricket. It was an excellent to review our businesses and outcomes of decisions made at the course, and to reflect on changes made by the course attendees.

The opportunity to have a network of business colleagues with whom I can bounce ideas with, is an asset to our business and me personally. I see this as the best legacy of the course. To have access to the calibre of farmers at the course will see me truly making informed business decisions, with the backing of experienced and genuine input from this tremendous group.



**Photo 3** Preparing our final presentation for the Worshipful Company. A collective effort utilizing the skills within the group.

I will be forever thankful for the confidence that Fairport and Nuffield had in me to attend the WCF course. I am looking forward to transferring the knowledge gained at the course into real outcomes within our business and concurrently, to share this information with the greater agricultural community. I would highly recommend attendance at the course for anyone wanting to advance their personal and business skills in an international environment. I will be forever appreciative to the other attendees for their friendship and look forward to many years of communication and visits to Australia and vice versa.

Natalie Williams – Nuffield Scholar 2012.



## **Additional Information about the WCF and the tradition involved with these highly respected UK institutions.**

### **The Livery Companies**

The Livery Companies of the City of London comprise the City's ancient and modern trade associations, almost all of which are styled the "Worshipful Company of..." their relevant trade, craft or profession.

London's medieval corporations originally developed as guilds and were responsible for regulating their respective trades, such as the control of wages and labour conditions. Like most medieval organisations these guilds or livery companies had close ties with the Church (at least up till the Protestant Reformation), endowing religious establishments such as chantry chapels and churches, and by observing religious festivals with ceremonies and their well-known mystery plays. The Livery Companies still retain religious connections today, although their members are free to follow any faith or none.

Most of the livery companies continue to have a trade, craft or professional role today: for example, the Scriveners' Company admits senior members of legal and associated professions, the Apothecaries' Company awards post-graduate qualifications in some medical specialties, and the Hackney Carriage Drivers' Company comprises licensed London black cab drivers who have passed the "Knowledge of London" Test. Several companies restrict membership to those holding professional qualifications in their trade, craft or profession such as the City of London Solicitors' Company and the Worshipful Company of Engineers. Other companies have evolved into being primarily charitable foundations, e.g. the Longbow Makers' Company.

The livery companies, which are currently 110 in number, play an important role in the City's civic and social life, providing networking and charitable-giving opportunities. They also retain voting rights for the senior positions, such as the Sheriffs and Lord Mayor, of the City of London Corporation, a local authority with extensive local government powers.

After the Worshipful Company of Carmen was accepted in 1746 no new companies were established for 180 years until the Master Mariners in 1926 (granted livery in 1932). Post-1926 companies are described as modern livery companies. The most recent livery company is The Worshipful Company of Art Scholars whose livery status was granted on 11 February 2014, making it the City of London's 110th Company by precedence.

The Honourable Company of Air Pilots is unique in having active regional committees in Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, New Zealand and the United States.

## **The history of the Worshipful Company of Farmers**

The Company's origins stem from the Chairman's Committee of the British Red Cross Agricultural Fund, which was set up during the Second World War to raise funds for the war effort. The whole of agriculture and its ancillary trades combined to raise over £8.5million.

To perpetuate the Fund's good intentions plans were initiated to create a livery company:

1946: Company of Agriculturalists of the City of London formed

1952: Worshipful Company of Farmers grant of Livery approved

1955: Royal Charter gained

Livery History of which the Worshipful Company of Farmers stands 80th in precedence, were originally founded as Trade Guilds to regulate the crafts and professions operating in the 'square mile' of the City and to help run the civic government of the City, including the election of the Lord Mayor and the Sheriffs through assemblies at the Guildhall. They took part in ceremonial events and collective acts of worship, whilst pursuing an ethos of charity, welfare and education associated with their trade/profession.

Close affinity with farming ensures the Company is strongly aligned to the key issues facing the industry today - quality food at affordable prices, global food security, climate change, biodiversity and environmental protection. The Worshipful Company of Farmers is a Livery Company that continues to grow, with some 400 members, of whom 350 are Liverymen.

A key goal of the Company is to develop the skills of everyone involved in the farming industry especially the development of leadership and management skills. The Company, through its Charitable efforts, provides substantial financial support to students to attend specialised educational courses to help to develop these skills.

The two flagship courses supported and promoted by the Company are the three week long Advanced Course in Agricultural Business Management run at the Royal Agricultural University in Cirencester and the two week Challenge of Rural Leadership course run at the Duchy College in Cornwall. Since their inception in 1963 more than 1,600 delegates have completed these courses and some of their testimonials can be read under the individual course details. Many of these individuals now hold very senior positions in the farming world.

In addition to the two flagship courses above the Company manages the Henman Trust which awards an annual scholarship to an outstanding student to help with the cost of travel and studies to obtain a significant period of work experience outside the UK. Traditionally, the award has been made to fund the costs of the travel but since the awards are discretionary, larger sums have been awarded if it has been felt that it would benefit the candidate to travel for a longer period. From the experience of recent awards it has been decided that both the Company and the recipient will get best value

from the available funds by sponsoring one outstanding candidate every other year for a Nuffield Scholarship for up to £10,000 towards the cost.

