



The Worshipful Company of Farmers – the 65th course.

Agricultural Business Management Course 2016. #wcf16

17th January to 8th February 2016

Royal Agricultural University, Cirencester, Gloucestershire UK.

Report for Nuffield Australia.

Sponsors: Chontell Giannini iTravel Griffith, New South Wales



My personal Nuffield Sponsor:



Thank you

Attendance of the course and international travel would not have been possible without the support of Chontell Giannini, of Itravel Griffiths, Nuffield Australia, and the Worshipful Company of Farmers, thankfully they all value and place importance on attending such a prestigious course, and I am forever grateful for the opportunity to attend.

Summary

The three week residential course, led by John Alliston, kept my head swirling for most of the time, with the exiting of one great speaker, another would appear, one could have been mistaken at the end of the first week that we had exhausted the list of empowering leaders in UK agriculture, but the further two weeks proved otherwise. The high regard in which the course is held, clearly attracts great industry leaders.

Although I was the only international participant this year, it did not detract from the course at all, and I believe most participants would agree that a small dose of Australian agriculture added to the diversity of the group and gave a different perspective to UK based agriculture.

The real strength of the program though does not come from the speakers themselves or the course content, it comes from the comradery and friendship that is developed over the three weeks, with the other course delegates, 18 of us in total, with a wide variety of specialisations, industries represented and experiences with which to draw from. Highly successful in their own right, it was interesting to draw from their knowledge when looking at either our own businesses, analysing other businesses or discussing the NFU, BREXIT, CLA, subsidy payments, LEAF MARQUE and many other issues. The breadth of knowledge that was evident across the group is enviable and I have no doubt that this will be useful for all of us moving forward in our businesses, professional and personal lives.

A strong message from many of the presentations was that global agriculture, or more importantly global society is at a precipitous time in our history, where environment, resources, food security, population and politics are creating a time of instability, opportunity, and a new social agenda that is defining the way we farm. Innovation and strong leadership were identified as being key to farmers navigating and prospering in this new environment.

The Course

The first week of the course focuses on getting to know the other course delegates quickly so that the free flow of conversation and communication happens naturally, and also focuses on our own personal development, it includes an in depth psychometric testing which helps to identify strengths and weaknesses and leadership styles of the individuals. The focus on our own business, our own time management skills, setting strategic direction and coping with stress proved useful with most delegates commenting on the difficulties of maintaining a health work/life balance. The first Saturday found us at Berkley castle and a look at how the estate is managed, one of the course participants Roland Brown manages the estate.

We attended a local football game, the Green Rovers, the team is funded by Dale Vince founder of Ecotricity. Ecotricity is a major player in the renewable energy sector. The stadium is powered by renewable energy, it boasts an organic playing field, electric charging stations for the modern car and no meat pies, with the entire menu served on game day being vegan.



Photo 1 Attendees of the 65th course, 2016.

The second week focused largely on hearing from successful business leaders, and how they had overcome difficulties, navigated through difficulty, or their leadership style within the business, we also had the opportunity to break into smaller groups and analyse 6 of the businesses put forward by delegates, at the end of the week, the groups presented on where they saw these enterprises headed in the future, what strengths, weaknesses and opportunity they saw for the business. This was a humbling experience for both those businesses that were being analysed and those doing the analysis, trust had to be developed quickly as sensitive information was shared openly. It was an excellent exercise to be able to break a business down, and then create a plan moving forward, working in a group with different expertise and then bringing all of that back together was a rewarding experience.

On the second weekend we could go home, however a number of delegates including myself decided it was too far to travel home and stayed at the RAU, we attended a great Rugby match at Gloucester, and visited Wales for the day, everything is very close and there is much to see in and around Cirencester itself, so it is easy to fill in the small amount of recreational time.

The highlight of the third week was working in groups on a real case study, we visited a farming family in the area, they allowed us into their business at a very intimate financial and family level, shared with us their aspirations and then left us to see what we would recommend. The four presentations were of a high standard and very professional, I found this an invaluable experience that will assist me in the future when analysing a business and making recommendations.

Take home messages from the course

- You can't make a 3 ton farm into a 4 ton farm, work with what you have – Henry Robinson
- The difference between the top 25% and the bottom 25% of businesses is management.
- If you think you are in control you are not going fast enough – Mario Andretti

The RAU was an excellent facility which provided quality accommodation on site, only metres from the lecture rooms. Fully catered, lunch always ended with pudding, and dinner was three course in the company of course delegates and some wonderful speakers, and a thriving conversation.



Photo 2 Master of the Worshipful Farmers Company, Thomas Wheatley-Hubbard and Kara Knudsen at graduating dinner

In conclusion the Advanced Agribusiness Management course, is an opportunity to grab hold of with both hands and run with it. The Worshipful Company of Farmers is a prestigious organisation to be associated with, a charitable organisation that amongst other tasks helps to educate and mentor the next generation from starting out in farming right through to future industry leaders, I look forward

to where this new connection will take me and my fellow delegates of the course in the coming years.