

UK LEADERSHIP COURSE - NOVEMBER 2006

“The challenge of Rural Leadership”

Report by Andrew Heinrich

On receiving a Nuffield Scholarship in 2006 I was fortunate enough to also be chosen to go to the UK for a Rural Leadership course in Newton Abbot, this was run by Duchy College with the Worshipful Company of Farmers. Having never been to the UK before I was looking forward to this great journey although a bit scared of what was in front of me, as I come from a place called Kangaroo Island just off Adelaide with a population of just four and half thousand people.

On arrival at Heathrow airport 5.30am I found myself on a train heading for central London (this was a new experience as there are no trains at home on Kangaroo Island). After some time and missing a stop I found where I was to stay for the next two nights, the Farmers Club.

I was lucky to be informed just days before I left that the UK Nuffield winter conference was being held the day after I arrived. I must admit it was a major challenge to find my way to Bedford but I did and was rewarded by meeting many UK scholars, and being able to listen to the presentations of the most recent scholars who did an amazing job and were very interesting.

Sunday morning I set off for Paddington Station to meet another person, who was also doing the course Andrew Brown, who emailed me before leaving Australia and said he would meet me with a ticket to Newton Abbot. After a long and enjoyable train trip I soon realized that I was going to make some new friendships with people from the other side of the world with similar issue as we do back home.

Late in the afternoon our course started with some quick introductions and then some bonding activities with Rachael Vowles from Northcott Theatre in Exeter. This was very different and something that I wouldn't do back home but we soon got to know each other quickly thanks to this workshop.

This was the start of thirteen days of many different things that made us think, open our minds, gave us a much different out look on life, gave us confidence and was the making of new life time friendships. We did a case study on Lloyd Maunder's chicken business, which took some time and was a real eye opener how his business works. What a great enterprise for the area, if only we could have something like this back home on Kangaroo Island. We learnt how big business works and how they are run from the top to the bottom - marketing, how to make decisions and many other leadership skills.

Some of the guest speakers were of a very high-class standard and I felt extremely privileged just to be given the opportunity to be part of this course. Some of these speakers were David Wilson on Organic Farming who runs the Highgrove Duchy Farms for Prince Charles, Mick Fuller who gave an interesting perspective and changed my views on GMOs and why the world needs them. Amazingly he was heading to Australia the following week and so this led to him giving a talk on this subject on Kangaroo Island on his visit to Adelaide where he also made an impression on this subject. But the most powerful speaker, who changed my views on the military army, was Colonel Bryan Watters, with his talk on leadership in the army and a very moving video on their peace keeping role in Bosnia.

Other things we touched on were grain marketing, media, their EU policy (which I now have some idea how it works), and our media day in Plymouth doing TV and radio interviews.

Then there was the singing in Buckfast Abbey, yes we had to sing, and then we were followed by the monks singing (they of course sounded much better than us). This was something I never thought I would be doing in my lifetime, but I am very grateful of the opportunity.

In summary I feel very privileged to have been part of this experience and would strongly recommend anyone who has a chance in going to this course to grab it with both hands. It will change your life completely and I believe has made me a better person. It made me realise how little I knew about farming in the UK, which I must say embarrassed me at times because they seem to know so much about farming in Australia. I am often asked what I learnt on this course which at first I found hard to answer. However I soon found myself talking about how the world needs food, how GMOs may help this, how the wheat stockpile has fallen from fourteen months to fourteen weeks, but most of all I heard about all the issues with farming in the UK. This being how foot and mouth changed their lives, mad cow disease, how they felt robbed by a small minority stopping fox hunting, and the overload of paper work, which they have to do these days. How similar farming is in the UK with us in Australia.

Then there are the lifetime friendships I have made, it really was such a wonderful group of people including the teachers. Hopefully Nuffield Australia continues to be part of this and I strongly recommend any of next years scholars to go for it. It has given me a good start to my Nuffield experience and will be a big help. Thanks to Nuffield Australia, Jetset Griffith, Duchy College, Worshipful Company of Farmers and all the people who were part of this - THANKYOU.