

The Worshipful Company of Farmers - -Agricultural Business Management Course 2015

Background:

The Worshipful Company of Farmers is an organisation dedicated to the advancing the farming industry and all those in it. Formed as one of the London guilds in 1946 to represent farming in the City of London. It's members Liverymen and Freemen (and Women) work to help promote farming to the UK population, develop professionalism through education and manages charitable activities. www.farmerslivery.org.uk

Their educational activities are primarily based around two flagship courses," Advanced Course in Agricultural Business Management" conducted by the Royal Agricultural University (RAC) in Cirencester and the second "Challenge of Rural Leadership Course" conducted by Duchy College. Since 1963, 1600 delegates have completed these courses including for many years Nuffield scholars from Australia.

Both these courses are now offered as post scholarship opportunities to Australian Nuffield scholars on completion of their scholarship and places are on an application bases with generous sponsorship provided by Nuffield supporters and investors.

The 64th Agricultural Business Management Course 2015:

I was fortunate enough to attend the 64th Agricultural Business Management course conducted in January 2015. My attendance was supported generously by itravel Griffith and Fairport Technologies.

I completed my Nuffield Scholarship in 2010 and after some encouragement from Jim Geltsch and past attendees I applied. For me, I felt I needed time between my scholarship and attending further Professional Development programs, as my Nuffield experience had provided major a catalyst for change within our farming system along with completing generational succession over the same period. We had plenty to implement and bed down, secondly, I feel courses such as these are for giving you a mental jolt to move you out of your rut and change the paradigm you are viewing your business through. Immediately post Nuffield was not the time for me but having settled back into old habits and a degree of comfort it was time to refocus and step up and challenge my thinking.

The stated aims of the course are:

Develop the managerial skills of the individual and understanding of land based business.

Enhance the present knowledge by the use of a range of educational techniques and exposure to influential industry commentators.

The first mental jolt I received was arriving to snow falling in Cirencester having left a barmy 30 degree Tasmanian summer, along with entering the fantastic buildings and setting of the Royal Agricultural University (established 1845).

There were 15 course participants from the UK along with myself and a New Zealand Nuffield scholar. The next three weeks was a combination of industry speakers, farm visits and group case studies.

The course co coordinator Professor John Alliston created an environment of trust and sharing between the course participants, we spoke discussed and case studied people's businesses within the group, sharing challenges limitations and opportunities.

Diversity of industries, scale and structures of the course group provided a fantastic learning opportunities and networking.

I was fortunate to have our business selected for one of the major case studies a great opportunity to have my decisions, paradigms, enterprise choices challenged and analysed. Along with identifying opportunities that seem obvious from another person's perspective.

Highlights for me included:

A presentation from Rob Shepherd a farmer and former Light Infantry Officer discussing leadership styles what relevant from the military in terms of leading people in battle and in business.

A visit to Rick Buckles 1100 sow indoor pig facility in which they had introduced a full bio security system whereby all staff and visitors showered and changed before entering and exiting the facility. The interesting aspect was the staff outcome. What was perceived to be an impost actually turned into a benefit. Staff became more focused once "inside" and arrived and left work clean and fresh.

Discussion with John Alvis UK Nuffield scholar , cheese producer and intergrated farming pioneer. The business intergates 1200 cows , 15,000 finishing pigs 1700 acres of cereal and cheese making, to have a cycle of grass, cows, milk, cheese, whey, pigs, manure, grass.

After three weeks of discussion, lectures, presentation, course dinners, networking, farm visits and some sleep. I returned home with fresh ideas for our business some reassurance we were on the correct course, new strategies for staff management along with a fantastic group of friends to add to a growing network of agriculturalist to share and draw on for ideas and inspiration.

Thanks to Nuffield Australia, Jim Geltech, The Worshipful Company of Farmers and the great team at RAC of Prof John Alliston and Rhonda Thompson and sponsors itravel Griffith and Fairport Technologies

Rob Bradley

