

# 23rd Worshipful Company of Farmers Advanced Rural Leadership Course Report

## Duchy College, Cornwall

### Report by David Drage, 2009 Nuffield Scholar

Firstly, thank you to the Lorna and Bert Kelly fund, Itravel Griffith, and the Worshipful Company of Farmers for supporting me to attend this course.

#### Introduction

In the six months between applying to attend this course and the start date, a lot changed in rural leadership in Australia. Problems in rural Australia had hit mainstream media, with books such as Gabriel Chan's *Rusted Off*. There was a massive protest vote from rural Victoria in the state election, and questionable behaviour by numerous people in appointed management roles across many rural based organisations.

With this in mind I was seriously questioning why I had signed up to an advanced rural leadership course on the other side of the world. I did not want to be part of the problem afflicting rural Australia and was overwhelmed with the responsibility that receiving leadership training implies.

Nuffield Scholars aren't quitters, so I packed my bags and headed off to Dartington Hall for two weeks of what could be described as a short Nuffield Global Focus Program (GFP) but without the bus!



Fellow Australian (2015) Scholar Han Shiong Siah (pictured left) met me at Totnes railway station and we headed for registration. We met the other 16 course participants, and the two weeks of intense learning began.

After a brief welcome and introductions, we were straight into a series of name learning exercises. As someone who struggles to remember my own name, a name learning exercise makes me extremely uncomfortable. Name labels were invented for a reason, and I am extremely good at remembering faces. But it worked. I got through the discomfort, and within a few days name labels were not necessary.

#### Course Program

The first full day began with a bus trip to the case study farm. This farm has been operated by the same family for nearly 500 years. Analysing the operation of this farm would dominate most of the first week. Most of the learning sessions were followed by applying what was learnt to the case study. The first week concluded with a presentation to the farm management team our recommendations for improving their operation.



**The Big Brother House, Week Two**

The second week concentrated more on leadership and communication skills. Guest speakers with varied management experiences shared their lives with us. One retired politician gave some enlightenment to how he felt UK politicians had lost their direction. This gave some insight into rural Australia's current problems. Sessions on psychometrics were very interesting. It was scary just how well the testing we had done revealed our personalities. I have never had the opportunity to do such testing before and found it extremely valuable. Knowing that I am an owl confirms how I should best use my personality for best management and leadership benefit.

Before we knew it our 13 days in the 'Big Brother House' was over. Course evaluation was actually quite difficult. How do you thank those who devised the course for what they have given? It was also time for good byes to new friends whose lives we had been sharing for two weeks.

## **Outcomes**

Over the two weeks we had numerous speakers present to us, many of whom had no agricultural background. Some challenged us, such as the Compassion in World Farming speaker, and some made us cry. A former soldier who was a UN observer in Croatia made any problems in our comfortable lives insignificant.

Possibly the best presentations were those done by the 18 course participants. Each of us had to give a short presentation on our joys and challenges. We were all very open in these presentations, and the breadth of experiences and personal challenges in the room was staggering. It gave a new admiration for many of the course participants. My presentation was about the challenges of farming in a changing climate and made many realise how close we are to the tipping point on climate change.

So, after two weeks what has this course given me? I do not have the answers to why some people in management roles do not fulfil their obligations responsibly. I do have a better insight into how good people can lose direction. I better know my strengths and weaknesses and can see how I can provide good leadership without being the front man.