

The Worshipful Company of Farmers Advanced Agricultural Business Management Course 2013

Introduction

The 62nd Worshipful Company of Farmers Advanced Agricultural Business Management course was again held at the beautiful and historic Royal Agricultural College in Cirencester from 20th January to 8th of February 2013. I fully expected to be challenged by the experience but the first thing I had to overcome was the temperature change. Flying into the UK from one of the hottest Australian summers I had experienced, with daytime temperatures regularly hovering around 47c to a very cold UK winter barely getting to 0c, it certainly was a shock to the system.



The 18 course participants were from all corners of the UK, with two Australians & a New Zealander thrown in to add an international and southern hemisphere flavour to the course. They represented a broad range of business enterprises like arable, horticulture, banking, renewable energy, estate management, land agency, livestock, livery, dairy and corporate farming. This diversity allows one to experience so many different points of view over the course, as well as in the hours spent networking with the other delegates over a hot pint, after Lectures had finished. The experience was not unlike Nuffield in many ways with the friendships of the people involved highly valued and a core component of the program.

Course Content

The aim and objective of the course say a lot about it.

Aim

Developing the managerial skills of the individual and understanding the management of land based business.

Objective

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

The course started with a brief self introductory then it was onto filling out the Psychometric test that provided a good in depth analysis of one's personality type, our weaknesses and our strengths. This provided a perfect starting point for the course as it allows you gain an interment knowledge of what makes you who you are and how best to manage or overcome weaknesses that are indicated. Having previously done several similar tests it was good to know I hadn't had any sudden personality changes and they all had been very similar in results.

Case studies make up a big component of the course with the first being on your own business. This was an excellent opportunity to do a SWOT analysis of your business and use the expertise within the group to look at the future direction that we wish to take our business. Too often we are caught up in the day to day running of our business, that we don't take the time to look at the strategic planning of the business and the opportunity to do so was immensely valuable.

The second case study looked strategies to secure the lamb and beef supply chains for the Waitrose supermarket chain. This was fascinating insight into the daily operations of the supermarket industry and the concern they are starting to show toward the supply of products needed to occupy their shelf space. It became very apparent that their biggest fear is empty shelves and the impact this could potentially have on their market share.

The third case study looked at a family farming operation near Avebury. This was a very well run business and in a very strong position, but was grappling with the need adjust their current enterprise mix and the levels capital investment potentially needed to upgrade some aging infrastructure. It was good see many of the issues that UK farmers face are very similar to here in Australia. Each case study we worked on in small groups, thoroughly discussed the business, did a SWOT analysis and prepared and presented power point presentation of our findings to the rest of the course delegates and the representatives of the organisations involved.

The listing of speakers who presented is long and contained some highly regarded individuals, from an array of backgrounds. There is too many to name them all but, these were some of my favorite speakers, John Alvis MBE (1983 UK Nuffield Scholar), Professor David Hughes,(Imperial College London), Peter Morris (Royal Agricultural College Cirencester), Rob Napier(Past Principle Orange Agricultural College), Alan Wilkinson (Head of agriculture HSBC), Professor John Wibberley (Royal Agricultural College Cirencester), Robert Cooper (Vice Chairman Worshipful Company of Farmers) and Chris Musgrave (Managing Director of Musgrave Management Systems). We also had two panel sessions that were very stimulating with plenty of thought provoking questions and answers.

The CAP and its reform featured regularly in the presentations. This provided us with some clues as to the direction of the CAP and the policy direction of the UK government, along with the likely impacts on UK agriculture.

Throughout the course we escaped the classroom to visit farms and other topic related enterprises. Several farm visits were organised within the group on the weekend and involved farms that were managed by a course participant or the company they worked for.

Toward the end of course we were offered the opportunity to have one to one session with course organiser Professor John Alliston. The experience of being able to discuss my personal and business aspirations with someone of the caliber of Professor Alliston, in a frank and open manor was very refreshing and something we often don't get the opportunity to do enough of.

Summary

The course was very comprehensive and covered all the skills needed by the modern agricultural business manager aiming to grow their business. The personal development aspect of the course along with the exposure to some very influential people in world agriculture was a great mix to give me the skills to focus on the business improvements that my earlier Nuffield experience had highlighted. The ability review your business from such external position is something only a course like this or the Nuffield experience can provide.

The new friends I have gained from the course will be a wonderful network for the future, not only as a business resource, but also on a personal level. To finish up one of our presenters finished his presentation with some very sound advice. He said these were the keys to success, *Have Fun. Do things profitably. It's all about the people.*

Acknowledgements

There are many people and organisations to thank when one gets the opportunity to participate in course like this.

Thank you to Jim Geltch and Nuffield Australia for my selection as the Nuffield Australia representative for the course.

Thank you to family of Bert Kelly (1951 Nuffield Scholar dec.) for their very generous sponsorship of my studies and providing the opportunity for an Australian to be a part of this prestigious course.

Thank you to the Worshipful Company of Farmers for their sponsorship, leadership and vision in holding this course. In the last 50 years it has become one of the premiere courses of its kind anywhere in the world.

Thank you to Jetset for their kind sponsorship of my air fares to and from the United Kingdom.

Thank you to John, Rita and Rhonda for their tireless work in organising the day to day running of the course and for the friendly environment in which are allowed to study.

A special thank you to my wife Meggan and children Robert, Caitlin and Bree for letting me again gallivant off to the other side of the world to take up this once in life time opportunity.

