

I had the privilege to attend the 71st Advanced Course in Agricultural Business Management organised by the Worshipful Company of Farmers in November of 2022. This course was held at the Royal Agricultural University at Cirencester England. I would like to acknowledge the generous support from Nuffield Australia, iTravel Griffith and the Worshipful Company of Farmers in allowing me being able to attend this course. I am extremely grateful for the support that I received and the opportunity to attend.



Royal Agricultural University - Cirencester

Prior to 2022 this course has been held over three weeks however there was some changes to this year with it being reduced to two weeks. As part of those changes saw the introduction of two Zoom sessions for two hours in the week prior to attending the course.

The course was very intense from the outset with the need to stick to tight timelines. Course delegates acted as hosts to our speakers. This involved welcoming them and then ensuring that timeframes of presentations and question time were strictly adhered. This could be difficult at times with all speakers creating stimulating discussion on the various topics. Failure to timelines adhere by delegates was seen as showing a lack of respect for the upcoming speakers as you are eroding into their time to present to the delegates or the catering staff if heading into a meal break. Everyone needed to be afforded respect.

We were led by course directors Keith Barriball and Karen Brosnan with support from Elizabeth Badger and Chris Frazer from the Royal Agricultural University as well as Marta Munoz undertaking the backroom grunt work. There were twenty delegates that attended the course with sixteen of these from the UK and the remaining four being international delegates. The countries representing the international stage were Australia, Morocco, Spain and Netherlands. The diversity of skills and background of delegates added to the level of discussion within. This included farmers, business consultants, surveyors, estate managers, farm managers, a solicitor, poultry procurement manager within a large supermarket chain, commercial export manager and a marketing/PR manager within a family startup.

There are extremely strong links between Nuffield and the Worshipful Company of Farmers and the course itself. The course was also facilitated by those who are scholars or have strong connections to scholars as well as many of the presenters being Nuffield scholars as well as some members of the Worshipful Company of Farmers being Nuffield alumni. There was one fellow Nuffield scholar who participated in the course. There were also several course delegates very keen to apply for a Nuffield scholarship as well in the future.

In the week prior to the course during the zoom sessions, we all participated in our psychometric testing with Stephen Harris. In the past this has been done in the first few days of the course. Completing this multiple question survey in the week prior allowed for us to receive our initial results of that testing in advance of attending with the final analysis being completed early in the week. This was an extremely interesting exercise gaining very accurate insights into our personality profile and management styles. Stephen evaluates those answers from the testing and develops your profile. He then follows up with everyone individually and discusses his assessment. It was incredibly accurate.

Our first get together in person took place on Sunday afternoon. After the obligatory welcome and course overview each delegate was allotted five minutes to tell the story behind five pictures that were of significance to them. This gave a quick insight into individuals values and what was important to each delegate.



Kenneth Russell Room

Speakers

Over the two weeks we heard from a vast array of incredible speakers. Each and everyone had important take messages. A small sample of these are below and their message.

Professor David Hughes – Global agribusiness and food industry developments

Also known Dr Food, I have never met anyone that can give a PowerPoint presentation for two hours and maintain everyone's undivided attention. This man nailed it. He achieves this by interacting with his audience and engaging them in the conversation. The energy in this man has is phenomenal and his message equally as impressive. He spoke

about food trends and what drives them. The rise of consumers seeming time poor and the growth in market of prepared meals and meal kits that are now home delivered. Then there is a change in the routes to the consumer via increased use of online shopping. Then there are the welfare and environmental pressures we are facing. Examples of the include is the move to slow grown chicken and having a low carbon footprint.

Amy Jackson 2012 Nuffield Scholar – The media. Building reputation and social licence to operate.

We face a changing world in demographics and urbanisation. We have growth of citizen journalism via social media streams along with activists and NGO's that are more sophisticated than ever before. We need to be able manage the issues when they arise. Identify our weaknesses to manage our risk. Build trust and credibility. The art of persuasion is important and gentle persuasion can be more effective than a strong force. When the worst happens, you need to act quickly, seek support and gain control.

Robert Shepherd – Lessons from the army.

Common Traits of successful leaders

- Vision
- Courage
- Self-belief
- Resilience
- The ability to delegate
- The ability to communicate
- Emotional intelligence

Leadership is lonely. The more you climb the tree the more you see of the baboon's unpleasant side. Good leaders are developed and not made. People like to be led however at the same time good leaders are good followers. Good leaders know their own limits. Leadership decisions have consequences.

Wilfred Emmanuel Jones (The Black Farmer) - The things I've learned (life & business)

Wilfred was born in Jamaica and moved to England with his parents at very young age. They settled in Small Heath which he described as a shithole near Birmingham. Most kids he went to school with ended up in jail. He made a promise to himself at 11 years of age that he would own his own farm. He flipped burgers to make a quid. In his view to be successful you need to be ruthlessly focused and have passion. He believes mindset and the audacity to dream big is where opportunity happens. Jeopardy is result of playing safe. You need to stay hungry or you become complacent. Wilfred purchased a small farm. He became known as The Black Farmer to the locals and from there he developed several products under The Black Farmer brand. These included sausages, chicken, ham and sauces.



Martin Thatcher 2005 Nuffield Scholar - Thatcher's Cider Company

Thatcher's Cider Company is a family-owned business that started making cider back in 1904. They aspired to quality cider that was well packaged. Key values that they follow are to invest in your business, invest in your people and give the customer what they want. Having a shared vision within the organization was a critical element to their success. They liked to operate on the three-legged milking stool. No matter how rough the ground is all the legs need to be on the ground.



John Alvis 1983 Nuffield Scholar & Johnny Alvis 2014 Nuffield Scholar - Lye Cross Farm

The Alvis family own and operate multiple enterprises within their family structure which are part of a circular economy. Starting with their dairy farm they have twice a day milking herd and a once-a-day milking herd. They process their own milk off farm. They take in milking from other dairy farms as well. The milk is processed into cheese and sold in supermarkets. Whey is a by product of cheese production and is fed to pigs. Effluent and manure generated from the dairy and pig operations is applied fields to replace nutrients used for growing grass or fodder crops thus creating a circular economy. They are starting now looking at the by-products of their various enterprises a trying to lower their carbon footprint.

Summary

This course has been an incredible experience and a wonderful opportunity to be part of. There are many things that go into making it the great course that it is. It started with the staff of RUA and Elizabeth ensuring everything was satisfactory. The kitchen staff who made sure we were never hungry to the guys in the Tithe bar making sure we were well hydrated. The course directors Keith and Karen facilitation of the course was first class. The Worshipful Company of Farmers are to be commended for ensuring the course content and structure remains relevant by sitting with delegates and seeking their views over an afternoon. Finally, my fellows delegates. Their openness, differing backgrounds and willingness to engage and learn from each other whilst being respectful at all times made for a brilliant two weeks. Great friendships were formed in that time and I certainly look forward to catching up with all of them in the future. I was asked for my three takeaways from the course when I returned home however I've come with four.

1. Have a vision on where you want to go? You can then plan a route to get there.
2. Profitability is the key to sustainability. You need to be profitable to survive.
3. Culture eats strategy. Having the right culture in place is imperative.
4. "Eat the Frog"



The participants of the 71st Worshipful Company of Farmers Advanced Course in Agricultural Business Management