

TEPAP 2014 - AUSTIN, TEXAS – JANUARY 2014

Report for Nuffield Australia, James Male (2011 Scholar)

With generous sponsorship from the Lorna and Bert Kelly Memorial Award and from Jetset Travel Griffith, I was fortunate to attend The Executive Program for Agricultural Producers (TEPAP) at Barton Creek Resort, Austin Texas USA in January 2014.

It was without doubt the most intense week of learning and business development I have ever experienced.

My initial reservations of it being too USA centric to be of significant benefit were totally unfounded as the principals learned and business skills acquired were universal in nature.

The program ran over 7 days and gave the unique opportunity to hear from some of the leading agricultural advisors and teachers in the USA.

It included 35 hours of lectures and a further 2 hours of open forum discussion each evening with the lecturers of the day.

In addition to the lectures, the opportunity to meet and learn from my 90 other classmates and peers created a motivating and stimulating environment. Many of these other participants were some of the smartest and innovative minds in US Agriculture. Whilst quite humbling and intimidating at times, the open sharing of ideas and strategies between the group was a real highlight.

Each day was divided into a morning and afternoon session with the question and answer session held after dinner each evening. The subjects covered during the course included:

- Family Business Management
- Financial Management 1
- Human Resource Management 1
- Process Improvements
- Strategic Management
- Megatrends in Global Agriculture
- Media & Public Relations
- Macroeconomic Impact
- Personality Profiling

Highlights

Process Improvement – Dick Whitman

This subject highlighted our need to improve every aspect of our farming business as margins continue to decrease and as we meet ever increasing consumer and regulatory demands. Some real practical ideas in getting standard operating procedures into place; improving farm efficiencies and management systems

Megatrends – David M Kohl

A pretty dry subject presented by one of the best communicators I have heard. His take home points included: liquidity is important at this time; US farm values are in a massive bubble; the importance of embracing technology; corn prices are under massive pressure in the coming year; US interest rates look set to rise; and the importance of looking at the economic indicators to gauge the temperature of an economy – housing starts; unemployment; core/headline inflation and leading edge indicators. His views were cause for great discussion and debate at the end of the day.

Strategic Management – Allan W. Gray

This subject focussed on us understanding our own business better, the different stages of growth; managing growing pains and the challenges of farm management. He also emphasised the tools of professional management which include: strategic planning; organizational structure; management leadership development and effective leadership.

Human Resource Management – Dr Bernie Erven

It was quoted by Dr Erven that, 'interpersonal and people management skill is going to be the most important skill in farming' and 'Business don't grow without adding people'. If we are to be serious about growing our farming business than dealing with human resource management is unavoidable. His theme was 'effective managers get things done through people' and his topics included practical solutions on how to be a better boss; organizational structure and dealing with problem employees.

Conclusion

What a privilege it was to attend TEPAP 2014.

My challenge now remains to apply to our business what I have learned. Almost every topic had an application to where our business stands at the moment. Our real challenges are managing growth, organizational structure, strategic and financial management and process improvement. I feel much better placed after attending TEPAP to address these issues that I either chose to ignore or didn't even recognise.

I would highly recommend this course for anyone whose farm business is growing or diversifying and wish to improve their management skill set.

Many thanks to Nuffield Australia for making this opportunity available.