

2008 Contemporary Scholars Conference ‘Down-Under’

Bringing together the world’s newly awarded Nuffield Scholars in Melbourne, Australia, the 2008 Contemporary Scholars’ Conference involved nine days of intensive study and hundreds of kilometres of travel to meet up with leading Victorian farmers and agribusinesses.

Innovative young farmers from around the world gathered in Melbourne in February to discuss the capacity of agriculture to meet the global demand for food over the next 10 to 20 years.

This issue was the key theme for the 2008 Nuffield Contemporary Scholars Conference, which brought together 45 recently-selected Nuffield Scholars from Australia, the United Kingdom, France, Ireland, Canada, New Zealand, Germany, the USA and Brazil.

Nuffield Australia Chief Executive Officer, Jim Geltch, said Australia’s selection to host the 2008 conference reflected well on the reputation of the country’s agricultural sector. He said although Nuffield had existed as an international farming scholarship foundation for more than 50 years, this was only the third contemporary scholars conference. The first was held in the Netherlands in 2006, and last year it was held in Calgary, Canada.

Australia has some great initiatives within the Nuffield network, and as a farming destination we are doing a lot of innovative things; we have a lot to offer the visiting scholars, Mr Geltch said. We have also been able to secure major sponsorship for the conference from Bayer CropScience, a company that leads international agriculture in research and development.

Many of the young farmers taking part were also leaders within their own farm industries and will be at the cutting edge of international agriculture in the coming years.

The conference gave participants an overview of global agriculture and trade issues, with presentations from successful agricultural business owners and managers. They considered the challenges and opportunities, business structures, resource efficiency and key performance indicators for agriculture in the future.

Providing a great opportunity to showcase Australian agriculture, the conference tour started in Melbourne and included three days of visits to Victorian farming operations in the Mornington Peninsula, South Gippsland, central Victoria and the Goulburn Valley, followed by a tour to Echuca.

Mr Geltch said the aim of the week was to develop and enhance international networks, and many of the scholars would continue with global research tours on their chosen topics following the conference.

Objectives of the 2008 Nuffield Contemporary Scholars Conference

- Develop and enhance international networks
- Give participants an overview of global agricultural and trade issues
- Take the participants out of their comfort zone
- Present successful businesses and their owner/managers vision
- Showcase Australian agriculture and industries

Theme of the week:

Has agriculture the capacity to meet societies demand for food over the next 10-20 years?

This conundrum was posed at the outset of the Conference. Also outlined were the many impediments to achieving that outcome, eg:

- The oil crisis and its impact on agriculture, manifesting in sharply increased cost of inputs and an increased demand for agriculture to produce energy.
- Climate change and the constraints placed on agriculture as a result of political pressure.
- Availability of human capital to manage any upside in agriculture.
- Therefore, it can be answered that agriculture will not have the capacity to meet food demands over the next 10-20 years. However, because of these significant constraints, the supreme irony is that huge opportunities will be created for individual primary producers because of these very impediments.

An attempt was made to address these issues and discuss how constraints are impacting on agriculture, as well as how individual businesses are capitalising on opportunities.

At the end of the week **Phil OCallaghan** (OCallaghan Rural Management) outlined issues that primary producers will need to address to capture the opportunities flowing to agriculture:

- Setting business structures for the future?
- How to improve your resource efficiency?
- What are the KPIs for agriculture?

More coverage of this event can be read at www.nuffield.com.au/conf.html