

Encouraging the Involvement of the Younger Generation within Agricultural Organisations

January 2008

Nuffield Farming Scholarship Trust



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NFU Mutual

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Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank the Nuffield Farming Trust who have been my sponsors and in particular the Nuffield Director, John Stones for his direction and support.

I would also like to thank the NFU members from Surrey and Cheshire who have always supported me throughout my application and during my time travelling. Without their support this would not have been possible. My appreciation goes to Robert and Sue Ranson, Pat and Bob Stovold, Angus Stovold, Georgina and John Emerson and Rob Ford in particular.

Of course I could not have anticipated undertaking my scholarship at all without the support of my parents and family.

My office staff in Nantwich have been amazing, Lynne, Melissa & Vicky held the fort whilst I travelled and left my desk nearly clear!

The 2006 Nuffield Scholars have provided me with help, support and inspiration since the start of my study, especially Nicola Raymond, Christine Hope, Stevie Houston and Wendy Houston.

In Australia, Kerrie Richards, in Brisbane was fantastic and really helped me with contacts and information.

I hope that I have provided my employers, the NFU, with helpful information and ideas. Many people within the NFU have assisted and supported me. The Director General and Director of Communication as well as other people from different regions and this includes my business development manager, Andy Williams who has always been there to encourage me forward.

I must also thank Sara Parker who assists me with reading my reports and putting them into some sort of sensible format.

I have found that this Nuffield experience has provided me with a life changing experience. It is like a trip to the moon; until you have been there you cannot understand what everyone means by 'life changing'.

Disclaimer

“The views expressed in this report are entirely my own and do not necessarily represent the views of the Nuffield Farming Scholarship Trust, nor my sponsor, or my employers, or any other sponsoring body”.

Executive Summary

Many Agricultural Organisations were started after the war to promote good farming practise. These organisations have been well supported by local farmers and have a tradition of family names running through committees. However as the number of people in the farming industry reduces these organisations need to review who is coming through to take the organisation forward over the next 30 years. How are they attracting the next generation? When I started raising this subject in 2006 I found that few organisations had actually planned for succession within their own group. As the number of farmers fall the number of agricultural organisations and groups increase. Not only do they require the support from Farmers & Growers but also each organisation has a cost to members for administration, if we combine resources and co-operate, the power of numbers and economies of scale could really help our industry.

I need to explain the age groups I feel organisations should be encouraging to become involved. The first is from 25 to 45 as this is the age group we have most to gain from. They are passionate, dynamic and forward thinking, they are planning their next 30 years in the agricultural world. Most organisations already have the support of the over 50's and those young farmers need some business experience but of course must not be forgotten. Often Young Farmers are already involved in youth organisations and are learning the skills of leadership and teamwork. Then when YFC finishes at 25, they vanish and reappear when they are 50!

I travelled to New Zealand, Australia, Wisconsin and USA and found that each country was in a similar situation and had the same issues, the majority of the committees are being run by those farmers who are over 50. Whilst there is nothing wrong with this because their knowledge and experience are helping the industry, it is important that those who will be farming over the next 30 years have their ideas and plans discussed and bought forward. There are of course a few under 50 year olds who are natural leaders and therefore have already become involved, but organisations can not run with only leaders, there must be workers too. I have looked at the cause for the lack of support and what needs to change.

So what has changed and how can this be addressed?

The traditional need for holding a meeting to exchange information has declined with the advancement of e-mails and web sites. Meetings are still useful to organise events because items need to be discussed and agreed, however some of this can easily be done with conference calls. Holding meetings on specific issues such as Bluetongue and the need to promote voluntary vaccination means that there is a good attendance because farmers are able to ask an expert panel direct questions and have their questions answered immediately. Meetings are an excellent way for the farming community to discuss current issues and therefore understand that they are not alone and that others are in the same situation. There is nothing like a crisis to draw people out of their houses.

As there are less people working on farms, time is ever precious. Unlike other office based occupations there is no 'in tray'. Stock need to be fed and checked daily, crops need to be sown, sprayed and harvested as per the seasons and weather conditions and therefore those working on the farm have less spare time to dedicate to organisations. Organisations that they do become involved in need to be of specific interest to them and their business, time is money.

So how can this be done? Organisations need to invite people to become involved. This does not mean attending meetings, it can be as much as passing on information or problems for an organisation to take forward and address. It is critical that the information flows both ways and a response of how the information is used is passed back, it can then be seen that they are

willing to embrace ideas and thoughts and therefore this will encourage more involvement. Family time is increasingly important and many farming businesses are run as a partnership between husband and wife, both being equal partners often with the wife managing the accounts and the paperwork, an essential part of the business. So why are organisations not inviting these articulate and dynamic females to become involved? It is more often than not because the databases the organisations hold still only have the father's details and therefore all correspondence is addressed to him. As ever the database is the key to connecting to the right people.

The structure of the meeting and discussion also needs to be changed. A good chairman will ensure that all views are considered so that the 'formality' is reduced enabling quiet members to voice their ideas. This can be done by email very successfully as shown in Australia by AgForce Future who discuss issues by email across the whole of the country.

The key to change is to step back and look at the current structure and age range within the organisation and to highlight areas of concern. Each and every organisation needs to look at what they do and if they can work together to reduce the number of meetings and duplication that occurs. Maybe by showing DEFRA how we are addressing this within our organisation, DEFRA might also be encouraged reduce the number of civil servants and stop the duplication of inspections and the paperwork farmers have to cope with.

It comes down to two points;

- If you always do what you have always done, you will always get what you have always got!
- A Culture that does not evolve will become extinct.

Introduction

I am a farmer's daughter from Surrey. My parents have a 600 acre mixed farm in Lingfield.

I am still involved in the farm especially helping with the sheep when I can. My annual lambing period is always a period of time to reflect and review the changes that have occurred in farming over the last year and to plan the way forward in the peaceful warmth of the lambing sheds. I was involved in my local farming community from an early age through hunting, local shows and the pony club. Each year I now steward at the Edenbridge & Oxted agricultural show.

I have been employed as an NFU Group Secretary for 13 years, which started in Milford, Surrey where I was an assistant group secretary for the Surrey West NFU. I progressed to senior group secretary in 1999. My area extended to include Dorking and Cobham Branches in 2000 and this meant the area that I covered was almost two thirds of Surrey.

I noticed that whilst the NFU in Surrey had a wide range of people of all ages who attended meetings and took positions of authority, other similar organisations have struggled with support from the younger generation. When I became the NFU Group Secretary I was 30 years younger than the previous group secretary! The senior generations came to meetings in the first year and then gradually the next generations would start to attend.

Surrey is unique in the fact that the farming community is small and therefore meetings, when farmers could exchange views, were welcomed as often some farmers would not see other farmers from one week to the next. Surrey has no cattle markets or collection centres and therefore social events or meetings are valued.

In 2006, at the start of my Nuffield Study, I moved to Nantwich in Cheshire for a new challenge as group secretary to the South Cheshire NFU. South Cheshire is a mainly dairy farming county with an active and well supported Young Farmers' Federation where membership ranges from early teens to 30, however few of them attend NFU meetings. Part of my role as group secretary is to travel round the farms and in doing this I meet numerous farmers and their wives under 45 who are not involved in the NFU or their local show.

I found that separate discussion groups attract a different generation; it is almost as though you cannot get two generations to sit in the same room!

Following numerous discussions it appears that around the country many organisations from the church to sports groups and even parent and toddler groups are struggling to find volunteers or people who are willing to take responsibility.

What has changed? Why in the 1960's and 70's did those in their 30's become involved in shows and agricultural organisations? What was the driving force and can this be rekindled to encourage the current younger generation?

One of the biggest challenges I faced whilst trying to research my subject was that every country has a successful network of young farmers' clubs and youth organisations but there was nobody who organised the transition between the senior and junior organisations.

It seems that in many cases, until I raised this issue, most organisations had not really thought about the issue! I visited Holland, Brussels, New Zealand, Eastern Australia and Wisconsin in the USA as part of my study. I found that my subject brings about a lot of debate from all age groups.

Then & Now

It is important to remember that many of the agricultural organisations were started after World War II. They all had specific aims but mostly they were formed to promote, maintain, improve and advance agriculture; to promote good farming and the advancement of the breeding and rearing of livestock, poultry and horses and to foster and maintain the education of the public and its interest and awareness in the agricultural industry generally.

Most local agricultural shows now include recreational horse classes rather than just working horses this has increased the size of the show and the number of people involved. Every local community is proud of their local show and they are well supported and appreciated by the rural community. The public still come to see the farm animals, as the farm animals are the main attraction. Shows are a vital showcase for the agricultural community and an excellent way of promoting the agricultural industry to consumers.

Many of these shows and organisations still have a large number of people in their 70's & 80's on the council and they are struggling now with some of the tasks in preparation for show day. Their knowledge and experience must be transferred to a younger generation and the involvement of the whole farming community remains essential to ensure that the agricultural 'core' of the show remains as it was originally intended.

Even though the shows have continued to evolve and attract visitors, the structure of the committees has remained unchanged and the formal systems remain unchanged as well. This unfortunately deters the younger generation.

Farm Competitions are sectors where younger age groups can become involved as individual farms are judged and therefore they are able to discuss their ideas and plans. There is strong competition amongst farmers to win the classes as great pride is taken in being awarded a prize.

The old structure of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) meant that farmers were able to farm with little interference. A.D.A.S and other government funded research centres helped provide the farming community with independent research and advice and were well received by farmers. With the changes to the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), the Single Farm Payment (SFP) and the decline of most of the government research institutes, information is now offered by numerous consultants and organisations, all running meetings and events. This provides a difficult platform to truly compare and offers little independent information.

Discussion groups have developed so that farmers can exchange information and benchmark themselves against each other, these have developed fairly recently and are seen to have a direct benefit to farming businesses.

The competition between organisations for members is leading them into new sectors and away from their specialist fields. Agricultural Shows, which are trying to become lobbying organisations, are going down the wrong road. If they can run successful shows and farm events that is what they should keep doing

Of prime importance is that those outside the Agricultural industry, from the DEFRA Minister through to the supermarket consumer, must all be constantly aware of the dynamic, progressive face of British Agriculture. The importance of climate change to the consumer as well as every political party has meant that farming is being targeted to show that the environment matters, every farmer is aware that we must continue to show how we value the land and everything it produces.

Our current NFU President, Peter Kendal is one such dynamic person. He is changing the way in which the government perceive farming and to have a young, positive, forward thinking and articulate farmer representing the industry is helping to take farming forward in many different areas.

Those organisations which still have the landed gentry as members, who continually harp back to yester - year, do not have the right image and sadly have a negative effect in attracting the next generation to become involved in agriculture.

Factors to consider

Reducing Number of People in the Rural Community – There are an ever decreasing number of people who live and work on farms; this affects not only the local farming community but also wider organisations. The reduction in the farm work force over the last few decades is now evident. Three decades ago, when there were 3 or 4 staff on a farm, the farmer could leave the farm all day and all the jobs would be done when he returned home. Now often it is only the farmer there to complete the jobs and therefore before he attends a meeting a full day's work must be done or, for a full day away, additional help will be required to complete the day's work.

There is no 'in-tray' with farmers as opposed to Office workers where work can pile up to be attended to another day, everything in farming has to be done on the hour on the day, be it feeding, milking, harvesting etc.

Travel – One of the first people I visited in New Zealand were the Taylors, a retired farming couple who lived in a beautiful house overlooking the Bay of Islands. I had a wonderful evening enjoying the best New Zealand Steak with a glass of wine and a lively discussion about agriculture. The Taylors came up with some very important points, most of which are listed below.

I was reminded that even 30 years ago, much of New Zealand was still cattle tracks and travelling any distance was not easy. The other factor, which is true, is that in the UK the road networks were not constructed and many households could only just afforded one car. Travelling was an expensive option. If there was a Farmers' meeting locally it was an opportunity to socialise and obtain and exchange information. Neighbours would arrange to pick each other up along the way and therefore all the rural community were involved. The current generations in New Zealand are increasingly mobile and will think nothing of travelling 150 miles to a show or meeting that they want to attend.

Communication - Meetings were once the best and quickest way of receiving information, especially if a speaker was visiting. Meetings are still seen as the best way to organise events via discussion and delegation, there is no substitute to having a discussion face to face to evaluate a crisis or problem and plan a way forward. However, in the last 10 years as technology has rapidly progressed, information is now required to be immediate and therefore, with the internet, email and text messages, information can be exchanged not only locally but worldwide in a matter of minutes. With the advent of technology one of the main reasons to attend a meeting to obtain information has now been removed. However the email system is now becoming clogged and there are now too many emails which means often they are not opened and not read or important messages are missed.

Change in Society – I am 35 and if I ask farmers' sons and daughters of my generation if they can remember if both parents attended sports day, the majority will say no. Their fathers were too busy on the farm either hay making, silaging or harvesting and therefore it was accepted he was not able to attend.

Today in the modern farmer's home, the farmer is expected to be as 'hands on' in the house as his friend who works in an office all day. Children expect both parents to attend numerous events and family time is increasingly important with many partners now working away from the farm in other professions. Child care duties are now split, child minding, putting children to bed and the taxi service to and from school and other events is now shared between the parents.

Respect for the Older Generation - This was an area I did not expect to come across in my study. Over the last three decades the change in the manner in which we deal with our senior generations now means that the younger generation often do not appear to show respect for the senior generation's views or ideas. It appears that over the last 20 years the younger generation are less likely to do what is expected of them and more often than not will do exactly what they want to do. The younger generation more openly challenge the views of their seniors and expect their views to be listened to and considered by the senior generation. This is not new as it is documented in a Greek Quote from Socrates, the quote referred to the fact that young people had bad manners and contempt for authority.

The older generation are often feel the opinion expressed are unbalanced and ill informed but often views are put across with more passion than thought and therefore the view is dismissed. Too often the view or idea will have been valid, and should have been discussed

and taken forward. However the result of it being dismissed means, that the younger generation feel there is little point in attending meetings.

The wisdom of age and the passion and energy of youth, if only we could combine the two, it would be a powerful combination!

Responsibility - the other big change in society is the willingness to be responsible. Many people are not willing to become involved in case they get given a job or responsibility. They are happy to attend if they know they will not be made 'chair' or given a specific duty. Many will become involved in shows as stewards as long as there is a senior steward to whom they can report and who will solve any problems. This is affecting every part of society. It seems the change in society from when you went along because your parent told you to, has changed and now the young will rebel against parents' views and interests. Organisations used to invite people to become involved in the committees and these duties were normally accepted with pride.

It seems that the change in society with the 'blame culture', foremost in everyone's minds means that nobody wants to be responsible for anything. This is affecting Parent/Toddler Groups, W.I, Sports' Groups; even Young Farmers' Clubs are having problems with getting people willing to step forward. Doing something that will help the greater community is now a low priority.

Often parents and children now split a business in order to progress, allowing their children to have part of their business which they control and direct. Little has changed over time, as families always found specific areas at which the younger generation excelled and therefore became involved, whilst the parents continued to oversee the business, very few ever retired. The current financial situation for farm businesses has resulted in a significant need for investment for the future and also to plan for succession as the business can no longer support several generations. Maybe children were more tolerant in the past in accepting the influence and views of their parents. Did they attend meetings with their parents because they were expected to be there?

This change is also affecting the transfer of information between the generations on all levels. Often the difference in views between the generations causes friction, as the different age groups are unwilling to listen and digest ideas. The older generations have managed huge changes over the last 40-50 years and their experience and knowledge must be valued and recorded, equally we cannot go back and must plan for the future with confidence. The world is a fast changing place and every business must adapt to this.

Women – Most organisations have traditionally invited the senior male in the business to meetings and the women have been forgotten! Many farming businesses are run jointly between husband and wife, with the wife making a large number of the financial decisions because as a rule she often does the accounts and has an accurate picture of the farming business. However, few meetings or invitations invite both partners and because meetings have traditionally been the male meeting place many women do not feel comfortable attending meeting. The timing of meetings would have to be altered to include both parties to account for child care. A daytime meeting may be more suitable if both partners are not working away from the farm.

Increasing Number of Organisations

Each year a new organisation is formed to control, legislate or even promote British Agriculture. Farmers are members of numerous organisations, a few of which they will actively participate in whilst others they are happy to support and just obtain information from.

Whilst government has now moved to regional centres, more groups and organisations have been developed to link into funding which maybe available. Local Rural Forums try to link the rural community with the councils. Rights of Way Forums are becoming increasingly important with the increasing conflict between the users and landowners. The development of National Parks, Environmental Stewardship, FWAG, and Soil Association mean another set of meetings and committees to focus on for different priorities.

It seems that whilst the number of farming businesses are in decline, therefore the number of farmers and those employed in agriculture is also reducing, the number of organisations trying to attract them proliferates!!!.

Every organisation needs funds to function and for administration, this means there is less money left to fund the work that they were meant to do. By reducing the number of these organisation and therefore reducing the administration costs this would definitely help the farming community. It is important to make sure that the long standing organisations we already have are directed so that they understand what their membership requires of them.

New Zealand

This was my first visit to New Zealand. I visited the North Island which has varying landscapes and agricultural businesses,. The first thing I noticed was how hard it was to farm in New Zealand. The changes they experienced when farming became unsupported have been profound but now, unlike the rest of the world, if it is not profitable they won't do it.

New Zealand has yet to develop a bureaucratic society and therefore all legislation is either for the safety of the food, environment or for commercial reasons. The focus of the country is on agriculture.

The close links with the UK have meant that the structure of the shows and organisations are very similar. Historically people have been invited to sit on committees.

The Federated Farmers of New Zealand is a voluntary organisation which represents farmers at government level. The field officers are able to distribute information and often identify younger farmers who might have an interest and become involved. The Federated Farmers have a specialist Leadership Programme to assist younger members with the challenges of duty. Unlike the UK, New Zealand farmers do not feel the need to hand the farm down through generations and therefore when they want to retired, the farm will be sold and the funds used to provide a living for the older generation.

Often the next generation are given a small helping hand but normally they will have to provide a business plan to the bank to obtain funds if they wish to purchase a farm to develop their own business. This means that the older generation are naturally stepping away from the industry but are still happy to assist in busy periods. I think this helps as the parents do not have control over the business and their views are often taken without issue and help is provided as a favour rather than out of obligation.

I stayed with a family who worked closely together running a farming business. Logan, who is in his twenties was the eldest son and worked closely with his parents. They were expanding the pedigree Holstein herd and had recently purchased some land adjacent to the farm so that a separate unit could be started. Logan's father asked for ideas and opinions from his son in all matters. Often when Logan made the decisions for the direction of the business and the herd, he was fully supported by both parents. The Farming business ran in harmony with all partners feeling able to openly discuss their views. Logan and his father often went to meetings together. This was what all farming businesses strive for but few achieve to due poor communication.

The Dairy Sector in New Zealand mainly sells to Frontera. Frontera meetings are well attended; I was told anything that affects the profitability of the business usually means a good turn out of farmers. Meetings are held on a regional basis as farmers are unwilling to travel far and need to get home for afternoon milking. Meetings are usually in the morning as evening time is seen as time with the family.

Farmers mix with a wide range of people within the community and value the information which can be gained from other businesses. Farmers are viewed as good businessmen and the local community still understand the issues which affect them. The importance of Agriculture to the National Economy is a driving factor and farmers still have a powerful voice in government.

The Royal Show in New Zealand has a youth council which organises the classes for Young Handlers. The show council is starting to look at how it could source attract stewards and volunteers from other fields. We had discussions that there were those within the industry

such as Sales Representatives, Support staff etc., who are often forgotten and have a lot of contact with the customers and would often welcome the opportunity to help their community.

It seems that Breed Shows and Societies are almost the exception to the rule. The older generation are willing to help the younger generations with the organisation and preparation. On the day of the show, showing livestock is truly a family affair and sometimes 4 generations will be seen to be helping either with the class or with the livestock. The young Holstein Group in New Zealand would hold separate meetings from the senior council but two of the senior council members will attend to listen to the views and take these forward. There was not a natural progression from the Youth group to the Senior Council.



Picture of Logan Scot's Farm – North Island New Zealand

Australia

Anyone who has visited Australia will understand its vast size; this really can not be appreciated until you try to cover a small distance which results in whole day's drive. This affects much of what Australia does, unlike the UK or England, the country is divided in to large states and organisations will operate independently.

I visited Brisbane in Queensland, on the Eastern Coast. The strength of the family unit is still strong within the committees for the Show and agricultural organisations. Many generations of the same family will be seen on show day. Some committees are seen as a closed shop where you will not be invited onto a committee unless you are one of the family members.

Due to the size of the states, farmers will travel long distances to a show and for sales as this is one of the few opportunities to really socialise with neighbours and friends.

Large Shows such as EKKA which is based in the Centre of Brisbane has grown from an agricultural base to a large fair which attracts hundreds of thousands of people each year. The agricultural sectors, still have the same names from 30 years ago and they have not yet wanted to embrace the problem of their successors. Some of those new faces who have been involved within the organisation for a few years have dropped out as there seems little way of influencing any change or encouraging new faces.

Haden Agricultural Agriculture & Produce show in Queensland is now run by a Committee of under 30's. Why did it have to get to the point when the show was at risk before the next generation became involved?

AgForce is a Queensland based non political organisation which has a similar role to the NFU but with a smaller field force. AgForce ensure that all members of the farming business receive information and have a specialist database which means that the correct information is sent to the right member.

The Organisation has branches which meet on farm, the success of each branch is determined by the Chairman and meetings can vary from an evening 'bring a chair and something for the BBQ' meeting and discussion. Resolutions are passed and sent to Brisbane or just to the Regional Committee if the issues are local.

The President and Brisbane Officeholders often do a tour of the areas to attend meetings and hear at first hand what issues affect them.

Committee members are made up of local, regional representatives. Recently farmers under 35 years old were invited to apply for 1 or 2 positions on the regional boards these are non-voting. These committees make their own decisions. They wanted views from younger people and over 15 people applied for the position. So far this is only on the cattle sector but it is thought this would role over to the Grain Sector too. The regional meetings are held every three months. Sometimes for specific issues a Regional Meeting of local branches will be held. These meetings are usually during the day with lunch provided and these are generally well attended.

Currently there is an AgForce Future – young member network, this is in its infancy but the aim is to connect to the next generation.

Future Farmers – This is an internet based organisation set up in 2002 and now has 680 members aged between 18 – 35 years. The aim is for younger farmers to be able to exchange views and information across Australia.

Initially it was just an email which was sent around to every member on a subject and the members were encouraged to respond and these responses were also circulated. The reason for the organisation is that it was felt that the voices of the 18 to 35 year olds were not heard and the senior organisations would not listen.

Currently it is funded by the government but they are looking at developing the scheme to be self supportive without increasing the nominal membership fee. They are thinking of developing social activities and meetings which they hope to link in with the regional Nuffield Group and Tours.

This is a unique organisation which started as the internet was still developing but reaches across all Australia from New South Wales and Tasmanian. The web site and technology have improved and this type of organisation can continue to blossom. The only issue I found was that there was no structure to take forward any views or issues to other organisations or to lobby the government. There are individuals within the organisation who will naturally use the information but there is no formal structure to provide a response.

America

This was also a surprise to see how much difference there is in such a young country. The mixing of the cultures from around the world is still strong and the traditional family values in rural areas still exist. Maybe because Americans have always been seen to express their views strongly whatever their age they have better communication between the age groups. In many rural organisations 50% of the committees are women; this I can see has made quite a difference as this means younger members are included

The USA was a country in which people wanted to go into farming and saw farming as a valued profession. I visited South Dakota and Wisconsin.

Again, due to the size of the country America's agricultural organisations are divided up into states. The American Farm Bureau has offices in each state and county. Within the Farm Bureau are the Women's Farm Bureau and the Young Farm Bureau with members from both of those sitting on each executive committee. Leadership programs were provided but normally these were taken by those in their 50's as those in their 30/40's were on the farm working

One of the most unique ideas came from a Young Farmer & Rancher Summer Conference. This was a weekend conference targeting families. It encouraged husbands and wives to attend and also provided "Free Child Care". An evening meal with entertainment for the family was included. This really was the best way to include the younger generation and provide them and their families with the opportunity to become involved in an organisation.

Each State holds an Annual Fair (Show) which is the highlight of the farming community as they compete and show their stock and mix with neighbours and friends. This is truly a whole family experience and those in the local village and towns support the event.

In Dane County, they also held a day of celebration for the farmers to thank them for producing food and looking after the countryside. This is another family event where all members of the rural community will help show the farmers how valued they are.

They have excellent links with the FFA (previously the Federated Farmers of America but now know just as FFA) and 4 – H programs (after school clubs based on Farming and Food production) which are targeted at the involvement of the younger generation within the

agricultural sector and therefore there is dialogue between the generations. Extension programs from the Educational centres out to the farming communities assist with this also.

I noticed that America has a different culture in the fact that children want to be involved in a group as this is part of their culture; it is important to be in a group such as a band or sports club and they are proud to be involved and will focus much of their spare time on this organisation. Involvement and Leadership skills are truly encouraged for all age groups.

It seems Americans strive to become a leader and obtain responsibility whilst in other countries this is shied away from.

Whilst in Madison I passed a Hip hop Band which explained in rap that they were trying to link the older generation with their youth so that they could communicate and understand each other's needs. They made a profound statement **"A Culture that does not evolve will become extinct!"**



Other U.K. Organisations

This is not purely a rural issue as it also affects sectors such as the Pony Club, Scouts, and Sports Teams which are also finding that fewer people are willing to donate their time.

A few organisations have recognised this is an issue for several years but there has been no change in the structure of the organisations and therefore there has been no change in the age groups involved. Many of these organisations in the UK have strong links with several generations of a family and therefore they still influence the structure and running of the organisation, this may also have been a deterrent to other people to become involved.

The involvement of children often encourages parents to become involved as they want to spend quality time with their children and support the teams they are involved in. If one parent dominates the group this will detract from the enjoyment and participation of others involved. Maybe this is the key to the solution.

How will I use the information I have gained

I have spoke to the NFU throughout my study regarding the information I have obtained over the last 18 months, I have been pleased that either they had the same idea or have listened to some of mine and put these in place.

Since 2000, I have provided NFU members in Surrey with a text service. This covered everything from Health & Safety visits, to thefts on farm, reminders about meetings and other small bits of useful information.

Whilst discussing NFU benefits at HQ, we discussed how nice it would be if NFU members received information on their phones. This year, during the recent Foot & Mouth Crisis and now the Bluetongue situation, NFU members are receiving text messages updating them of the current situation.

The ability to send hundreds of text messages instantaneously has benefited the organisation by showing members that they can be kept updated wherever they are. This is the first crucial part of encouraging people to become involved, they will only want to become involved in an organisation which they think is relevant and which can have some direct effect on their business.

NFU Online is now an excellent way of obtaining updates on current situations and includes consultation documents. The aim is that each member will be able to tailor their page for their own interests and information will provide a useful tool. The biggest problem is encouraging the membership to use all the information available to them. It must be remembered that farmers are not people who spend time sitting in front of a computer searching for information. The computer is a tool which is used to store information from the farming business and therefore there needs to be a balance of posting information and highlighting this information when relevant.

Updating the Database. The information that Agforce keep on their data base and the way they provide the information to all members of the farming business is a perfect way of including the next generation. In 2007 the NFU had the regional network to ensure that the correct member of the family was receiving the information and asked for additional members to be added to the system. Email addresses, mobile numbers etc., were all recorded to ensure that the information was sent to the correct people.

I attended the NFU AGM in 2006. I had just returned from my Nuffield induction full of questions and queries. The NFU AGM was still a fairly formal affair but a few of us managed to use the dinner as an enjoyable way of mixing with the few other younger members who were present. I am glad to say in 2007 and 2008, each region sent two young delegates from each county. This was a huge success and those who attended were very impressed with the NFU and what it does. However the younger members do not feel confident to ask questions in those forums.

Often it is not the direction an organisation is going in that is the problem it is the support from those within the industry that is required to show strength and union. Criticism from a generation which is not involved is often harsh and unfounded but is often because they are unaware of the work involved and because there is a total lack of understanding of the organisation.

Why have some council delegates stood for 10 years without anybody wanting to challenge their position? I am still unsure how this can be changed. The work of the council delegates and those sitting on commodity boards means that they need to spend some time away from the farm and this for younger farmers can be more difficult.

The NFU have listened and implemented many changes in the last two years. This is having an affect as younger members are now receiving information in a fast and efficient manor.

I am aiming to hold a local meeting for those under 40 to provide them with some information which will assist their businesses in the future. Meetings need to provide inspiration, information and be forum for expressing views and the passing of information. The time spent at a meeting must be well spent and be structured in such a way that it will challenge minds over the following weeks. Feedback must also be given on the thoughts and views which we expressed to ensure that something was done with the information.

It seems that my chosen subject for my Nuffield Study was very timely as this was the year the President of the NFU changed and Peter Kendall and Paul Temple bought younger faces into the forefront of the agricultural industry.

Why is this important that people become involved?

More people need to give up their time to volunteer on committees for shows and the future of organisations if they don't these committees will die and so will the organisations they support. These are part of our community which we take for granted and expect to always be there.

Agricultural Shows are a great way of showing our consumers what we do. If the small shows start to fail or change into horse shows we will lose an opportunity to communicate to our consumers and therefore miss an opportunity to celebrate our farming industry and promote British produce.

Organisations such as the NFU have a challenge and that it is trying to be all things to all people, the structure has been changing over the last 10 years and this must continue to develop over time.

All organisations have some younger people who are involved; often there are those who have leadership skills, Nuffield is a perfect example of this with all age groups being involved within the industry. These people value the exchange of information and having their views challenged. However, organisations will not survive with just leaders, organisations are like bee hives and we need the workers to provide the food. Those who do not want to be chairman or president still have views that are important.

Another unseen benefit of meetings and organisations is the aspect of unity and the ability for a farmer to express his concerns and frustrations at a meeting. It may help him too when he finds out that others have the same issues and if everyone has the same issues then something can be constructively resolved through the Chairman. Farming is still within the higher sector for suicides and injuries on farms are often as a result of people being stressed and flustered

British Farmers are well known for not being able to work together. Small groups with common interests can and do work. The ability to discuss issues and socialise at the end of a meeting must not be underestimated.

Conclusion

You cannot force people to become involved, it is an area of choice. The organisations which are supported by the full range of age groups are often those such as breed societies where children are showing cattle, assisted by their parents and supported by their grandparents. Stewards are almost entirely from those who have been involved throughout their younger years.

We must remember that one person will be a member of numerous organisations yet will become involved with only a few. Ensuring that databases of interest are correct and regularly updated means that information is sent to the right family member of the business. This will improve success.

Meetings should not just be arranged for the sake of having a meeting. A definite reason for and an outcome must be achieved. Time is precious and must be valued. Organisations must recognise this issue and instead of competition for people to come to meetings, joint meetings should be held with key groups to show a united front to farmers and those outside the industry.

We need to ensure that organisations constantly try to look at providing a succession plan for their organisation. How long has each member sat on the committee, have they tried to find a successor? Organisations with youth groups should look at the two groups working together. One big issue with all organisations is that when items are asked to be taken forward they are absorbed in the void and rarely is the information passed back as to the reasons why or why not the information was or was not used.

Senior members can of course continue to be involved and support the organisations, if those running the farming business cannot spare the time away to become involved the knowledge and experience of those in their 50's and 60's is extremely valuable. However what must be ensured is that the views of the younger generation are taken forward even if this is against their own views.

Inviting the younger generation to sit on committees and become involved within the organisations will aid the movement of information between the generations.

However we must also recognise that those individuals who dismiss ideas and block change, must be encouraged to take a step back, to ensure their previous hard work and effort is taken forward and developed in the future. There are young old people and old old people !!

Everything about involving all generations in an organisation is positive. The young need to learn vital history and experience from the older generation, and the older generation should embrace the passion and enthusiasm of youth.

Organisations which have the right people, address the relevant issues and are seen to be effective, will continue to attract the younger generation to become involved.

All age groups will attend meetings which affect them or their businesses. It is difficult to involve the younger generation if they do not have financial control of their business because all decisions will eventually cost or save money for the business.

The priority of 'family time' is the key. Organisations and events which include all age groups and members of the family are more successful. If conferences can include child care and also meetings for both partners in the farming business together with social elements, it may be better supported.

It seems that the UK forget the importance of the women within the agricultural industry, women are often more able to adapt their time to become involved. The USA seems to have addressed this issue but the historic structure of British organisations is still mainly a man's world.

There is no organisation in any country I have visited which has a proven structure to enable the transition from young farmers or youth groups to senior organisations. Therefore no-one organisation has a successful 'succession formula' in place. Much must be done by trial and error and be constantly reviewed. The age of those on the ground visiting farms or acting as the secretary seems to affect the age that will become involved within organisations.

Recommendations

1. The number of rural organisations and groups need to reduce to reflect the reducing number of people involved in the farming industry. All organisations should review their objectives to see if these are already included in another national organisation and therefore combine resources and streamline services provided.
2. There must be recognition that the issue of succession should be addressed within their organisation and develop and implement a plan to ensure that this issue is addressed.
3. The Databases for organisations should be updated on a regular basis, to ensure that the right people are involved. Do not forget the importance of the females and partners in the farming industry. Too often the letter or invitation is addressed to Sir or the senior partner!
4. Information can be passed through many forms and alternative ways to discuss subjects such as conference calls or text messages must be considered rather than just organising a meeting. Views must be sought from all age groups, these must be considered and developed.
5. A maximum term for any member on a committee should be put in place, ensuring members step down. Older members are still able to be co-opted or act as a vital source of information i.e. consultants.
6. The young dynamic face of the agricultural industry should be shown to the consumer and other industries at all opportunities.
7. The future success of the Agricultural Industry must be talked up at every opportunity, we must not forget how complex most jobs on the farm are and the benefits of working in and for the rural sector in the community which are not compensated for in monetary terms.

Ends.