

How Farmers Influence their Industry

A report for



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2007 Nuffield Australia Scholar

Completed July 2008

Nuffield Australia Project No: GRDC 0306

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Foreword

Several years ago I met Dean Johns, a local Nuffield Scholar who was presenting his study on Precision Agriculture at one of our local Wallup TopCrop meetings. His presentation inspired me to one day have a crack at a scholarship and eventually in 2006 I applied, but was unsure about what topic I should pursue. Reading over some past Nuffield reports I came upon Brian McAlpine's which stated that, "every industry needs a voice to represent it politically and to raise issues that could threaten its existence" (McAlpine, 2002). I had been locally involved with farmer representation for some time and thought this could be a chance to help strengthen our voice by learning from other international organisations.

After attending numerous interviews and meetings I soon reached a few fundamental conclusions, effective representation relies on money and resources. However travelling to different countries also gave me a chance to blend into another nation's social fabric and learn about the general public's concerns and views about agriculture. This gave me an insight into perceptions and stereotypes which farmers constantly face.

Nuffield has given me lifelong friends while providing the opportunity to travel to some remarkable places and increase my knowledge about world agriculture. So, to anyone who is thinking about applying for a Nuffield Scholarship, I would simply recommend that they stop thinking about it and do it!



Acknowledgments

Firstly I would like to thank Nuffield Australia for selecting me to become a scholar in such a prestigious organisation. I believe that the benefits of this marvellous experience will assist me well into the future. Not only has it changed how I view the world but it has also given me the confidence to think differently in many situations. Thank you also to the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) for sponsoring all their scholars to have the Nuffield experience.

A huge thanks to the Young family who hosted me over Easter while I was caught in the UK holiday season, Julian and Sandra who let me crash at their apartment in London and my Netherland and Canadian surrogate parents Tonnis and Ineke Wolthuis and Mel and Elaine Harris for feeding and watering me. Thank you to Carlos for giving me a quick drive to his farm in Spain and Kees Huizinga who gave me a very profound insight into farming in Ukraine. Romain and Kristal for welcoming me to stay in their home and Tim and Doug for letting me use their foldout beds. It has all been appreciated and I thank you for your hospitality. And to everyone else who I met on my travels and gave me the time for a meeting or a chat, I thank you for making all of this possible.

It would not be an authentic acknowledgment if I did not give a special shout out to my girlfriend Simone, parents Trev and Elaine and employee Peter who managed the farm without me during a very trying season. Thank you for your support and strength that enabled me to take part in this truly amazing experience.

Contents

Foreword.....	3
Acknowledgments.....	4
Contents.....	5
Executive Summary	6
Introduction	8
Objectives.....	13
Representative Organisations Visited	14
Representative Organisations	15
Membership.....	15
Structure	17
Financing.....	20
Services	22
Young Farmers.....	23
Effective Influence.....	24
Influencing (pressing the buttons).....	26
Image of Agriculture	29
Campaigns.....	30
Global “Gems”	33
Conclusion.....	38
Recommendations	39
References	41
Plain English Compendium Summary	42

Executive Summary

Many Australian grain farmers find the topic of representation a very dry issue which involves long drawn out meetings, producing pointless policies and focusing on politically driven agendas, which has more often than not lead to apathy from a declining membership base. At the same time there have been an ever increasing number of pressure groups bombarding the public with their own views on how governments should handle agricultural issues. More recently parliamentary committees are tending to consult widely on a range of issues but favour dominant, representative organisations that have accurate and comprehensive information. This is highly concerning as national grain representation is currently completely fractured and more pressure groups are gaining public (mainly urban) recognition and membership.

There are various ways farmer representative organisations can be structured, although most have a democratic grassroots membership base that sets policy and elects delegates who, in turn, represent the membership. This democratic system does allow a diversity of members to voice their opinions however it is difficult to achieve consensus when developing policy. Lobbying is the main focus of all the organisations though many had extra benefits and discounts used to attract voluntary farmer and associate (non-farmer) memberships. Affiliation fees and dues for membership are the most common method of financing services and many larger organisations had additional commercial income streams. Many considered young farmers highly important to the future of their organisations and hence were provided with separate committees to allow them to contribute their ideas on policies. I believe that the most functional structures had a clear framework of representation and where not heavily bureaucratic in their administration processes.

The best farmer representatives and lobbyists that I met had three key qualities that gave them access to the people they wished to influence. They had a good **reputation** built on credibility, an extensive network of **relationships** through all levels of the industry and government, and a **strong message** built on good policy which was supported by high quality information. The proactive promotion of a positive image of agriculture was also a common thread between these leaders.

Influence is generally used to confirm, modify or change beliefs' on a range of issues. There are three broad methods which are used between government, industry and representative organisations.

Bribery – comes in many shades of grey but is generally considered illegal

Negotiation – the most common method of achieving influence

Dissent – commonly used as a show of force e.g. demonstrations and protesting

The success of any method of influence came down to each organisation being organised and having a clear focus on what they wanted. Ultimately the effectiveness of any campaign was driven by the willingness of its membership to actively participate and tackled the core issues. Farmers need to understand that continual internal bickering is pointless and in the end it is up to them to choose how they want their industry to look and then co-operate to achieve it.

Introduction

It is an indisputable fact that the current world of agriculture is a different planet compared to that in which our forefathers first worked. The romantic agrarian farming values of cultivating a simple living from the land is iconic on many levels, and used in rhetorical verse whenever the industry is put into question. However, this image does not fit easily into modern agricultural models of economic rationalism and globalised marketplaces. The emerging animal welfare and environmental movements have increasingly challenged farmers' current techniques causing the very basis of production to be questioned.

A brief history of Australian Farmer Representation

The origin of farmer organisations in Australia is greatly attributed to the industrial disputes and labour union strikes of the economic depression in the 1890's. It's this period when people first strategically united on a national level to deal with common issues (Pook, 1993). Employment conditions, land availability and market reform were the main agendas of the first farmer organisations and in many circumstances they used their pastoral wealth to gain political representation to exert their influence.

Since these early days farmer representation has had a very turbulent history at national but mainly state levels, with a succession of mergers and amalgamations countered by the formation of fractional and breakaway groups. There have been numerous pushes for unity by government commissions wanting a concise industry view, and by farmer organisations to remove duplication and avoid the tendency of groups to play off against each other. However these attempts at harmony have been thwarted in times of economic hardship or industry adversity when new splitter groups have been formed on the basis that the existing organisation had 'caused' the problems and the new organisation would undoubtedly cure them (Trebeck, 1993). Differences in backgrounds and traditions, inequitable representation within the organisations, attitudes towards marketing systems and personality clashes seem to be the root of most disputes. In many ways most groups want the autonomous freedom that independent specialist organisations provide, but are drawn to the strength that unity affords.

Urban/Rural divide

It is estimated by the International Monetary Fund that national and personal global wealth is increasing at nearly 4% annually which is driven by the developed and developing countries. There is also a trend in developed countries towards an increasing mean age of farmers coupled with a decline in the total number of farmers. The increased affluence of consumers has affected the general public's attitudes which seem to care less about but demand more from their agricultural producers. Consumer's desire for high quality food at cheaper prices is inequitable as farmer's battle against the eternal struggle of tightening terms of trade and increasing regulations. The percentage of disposable income spent on food has steadily declined over the past 50 years whilst it is often commented that the current urban generation no longer has ties to rural areas, and hence has lost connection and knowledge about the food they consume.



Figure 1. One of many sign posts viewed in Den Haag, Netherlands, 2007.

This disconnection coupled with increasing consumer views that food must be organic, have no impact on the 'natural' environment and does not exploit animals (Figure 1) is exacerbated by the out breaks of animal diseases, the raging debate over genetic engineering technology and food safety. This is further highlighted when urban families looking for a 'tree' change in rural areas complain about farm smells, sounds and activities. Ultimately they are turning to legislation to ensure that farmers are doing what they perceive as correct.

Pressure Groups

To many farmers it seems like the agricultural sector is continually justifying its established practises against a wave of increasing pressure from special interest groups which are not directly associated with production. They feel like these pressure groups are bent on ensuring farmers' slowly surrender their right to farm by creating regulation merely to justify their existence. It would be easy to dismiss these organisations as extremists with misinformed, irrelevant views, however they are becoming more influential as they successfully raise their arguments into the consciousness of consumers and potentially shift the support of public opinion.



Figure 2. PETA anti-live export billboards, March 2006

For example Greenpeace has successfully raised their objections to the use of genetic engineering technologies around the world on the grounds of unknown food safety and environmental impacts. The international animal welfare organisation People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) has attacked farming practises (Figure 2) while promoting vegetarianism. Under their Kids' Corner banner they have even setup PETAKiDS.com aimed at *educating* children to create an "Animal-Friendly World". The website contains contests, games, newsletters, activities and features celebrities promoting their message. This has also spawned local Australian groups such as Animal Liberation Victoria who are attacking the Australian dairy industry (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Animal Liberation Victoria anti-dairy campaign, June 2007

The need for Farmer Representation

With the emergence of pressure groups in mind there is one principal lesson farmers can draw from history. It is that when farmers are not strong, there are many sections of society which are ready not only to tell the farmers what they should do, but even worse, to speak on their behalf (Perteve, 1993). In Australia this is exacerbated by the structure of state and national electoral boundaries which weigh in favour of population representation, not area. Rural communities and therefore agriculture, effectively has low governmental representation while urban electorates hold a greater number of seats in parliament. This majority of urban power over legislation can directly affect the livelihood of farmers through government policy. It must be pointed out that whilst government creates policy, it is the public that provides them with the mandate.

The need for representation in the Australian grains industry was again emphasised as it reels from the fallout of the Cole Inquiry into AWB's misuse of the United Nations oil-for-food programme. Substantial fractures in state and national farmer representation organisations have emerged over differing policies on how wheat marketing arrangements should be conducted. Two major state organisations resigned from the national Grains Council of Australia in protest while a new wave of representative groups found their voice. This not only highlights the continued diversity of views and opinions amongst the Australian farming community but also how fragile national industry representation can be.

Ultimately these fractures are hurting Australian farmers as the government has stated - they have a strong desire and a preference for a single industry voice (Fitzgerald, 2006). If farmers want to take the lead against well organised professional pressure groups who are all too willing to speak on their behalf, they must first organise themselves in a sensible way and have a clear focus on what they require.

Objectives

The focus of this report is based on an international travel study examining how farmers influence their industry in different countries. To enable some clarity between organisations and to build on my own knowledge base, I had a strong focus on grains industry representation. Various farmer representative organisations were interviewed in an attempt to identify how effective organisations operate and the methods of influence they use. The hope is that this information will be used to inform Australian farmers and to help provide additional information to farmer representation organisations in Australia.

Key farmer representative organisations were selected by literature review and recommendations from industry representatives from each country visited. Generally an initial internet based search on each organisation was performed before a formal meeting with senior staff was arranged usually at their office. This information is mainly qualitative, which makes it hard to directly compare all findings.

Initially a survey method based on the structure and operations of representative organisations was applied however after only a few preliminary interviews it became obvious that organisational structures were generally similar therefore I chose to refocus on why and how these organisations operated in an attempt to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of their strategies. Finally, I sought to draw conclusions from my study, and make recommendations, based on my analysis of the experience of the organisations I visited. It is important to note that although general issues will be raised I will not go into great detail but instead look at a few ways these organisations operate.

This report is broken into two main sections outlining;

1. The different ways in which organisations are structured
2. How to effectively influence agricultural policy

Representative Organisations Visited

The following is a list of the main organisations I visited during my study tour.

European Union: COPA/COGECA (Brussels), Confédération Paysanne Européenne (CPE) and Bureau de l'Agriculture Britannique (BAB)

Australia: National Farmers' Federation (NFF), Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) and the University of Melbourne

New Zealand: Federated Farmers of New Zealand (Inc)

USA: American Farm Bureau Federation, Farm Bureau of California, National Farmers' Union, National Association of Wheat Growers, American Corn Growers Association, National Corn Growers Association, Gordley Associates, 25x25 America's Energy Future, California Farm Bureau Federation and the Office of Senator Chuck Hagel

UK: National Farmers' Union (England & Wales) NFU, Scotland National Farmers' Union (SNFU), The Robert Gordon University United Kingdom, British Egg Industry Council, National Federation Of Young Farmers' Clubs, Farm Energy Centre, Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), Linking Environment And Farming (LEAF), National Proficiency Tests Council (NPTC) and CMI

France: National Federation of Agricultural Workers' Union (FNSEA) and Jeunes-agriculteurs (JA)

Canada: National Farmers Union (NFU), Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Manitoba Cattle Producers Association (MCPA), Canadian Grains Commission, Canadian International Grains Institute and the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB)

Netherlands: Greenpeace headquarters

Brazil: Brazilian Confederation of Agriculture and Livestock (CAN)

Representative Organisations

There are a massive number of organisations working to represent their members all over the world. These organisations can have very specific operating structures such as trade unions, craft/professional associations, corporations, charitable and community groups, citizen and even inter-governmental groups which have different constitutions and objectives, yet they all exist in order to represent, protect and advance the interests of their members (Trebeck, 1993). This emphasizes that there are many competing organisations trying to get the attention of government, industry and society and they all need two things to be heard 1) a framework in which to operate and 2) a clear message. The following is a general outline of how numerous farmer representation organisations are structured.

Membership

The majority of farmer representation organisations around the world operate autonomously to government departments and rely solely on a farmer membership base to define their purpose. Obviously the definition of a farmer can greatly affect who the organisation allows as members. Generally a farmer is considered as someone who owns and operates an agricultural production business, however there is a lot of fine print regarding size, time, investment, production and income that can go into this description. Most organisations visited based their credibility on how many members they serviced. However most only provided very general figures and trends due to memberships being based on enterprise rather than individual based, making it difficult to calculate the actual numbers. I also believe that because many had a declining membership they did not want to be seen as losing their membership credibility but instead focused on their policy achievements and value of the production they represented. Memberships to these organisations can broadly fall into either compulsory or voluntary categories.

Compulsory

This method of membership for farmer organisations is rare however there are numerous government levies/check offs that farmers are legislated to contribute towards. In France the Association Nationale pour le Développement Agricole (ANDAs) levy is used in development and training while in Australia there are 15 commodity based Research and Development

Corporations (RDC's) who fund sustainable and profitable agricultural programs. Legislated funds were on the whole officially not meant to be used to lobby or influence government. In the 1990's the Federated Farmers' of New Zealand underwent a massive restructure when the government abolished compulsory unionisation of farmers which forced them to become a national organisation in an attempt to reduce expenditure as their membership basically halved overnight. The Brazilian Confederation of Agriculture and Livestock (CNA) was the only organisation visited that still had compulsory union membership. Even so, 1 in 5 farmers still elected to join a voluntary organisation because they felt that they were not being properly represented.

Voluntary

The majority of memberships were based on farmers that voluntarily joined primarily because they agree with the values of the organisation but also to receive benefits which are only achieved by becoming a member. In many cases long term members felt an emotional bond with the organisation and hence become extremely loyal. However even though the cost of memberships are usually minor compared to other farm operating expenses, there were no voluntary organisations that were close to achieving 100% of potential farmers as members. More alarming, most had a declining farmer membership which is partly due to the decline in the base number of farmers, but also lack of empathy for the organisation. There are numerous reasons why farmers do not become members of representative organisations which include;

“We're far too busy and are only focused on production”

“I have no time for pointless meetings or any other responsibilities”

“We already pay levies for research that will help our industry”

“I don't need to join to get the benefits that the organisation achieves”

“They're are toothless, have never done anything for me and do not represent my morals”

Associate Members

In an operating environment where there is strength in numbers, many organisations had widened their membership categories to include additional non “farmer” memberships such as Women, Young farmers and Students. All these categories have an agricultural flavour and yet they are generally only creating new membership options by dividing up the more

traditional enterprise based ones. This can be beneficial to increase official numbers but may potentially require more resources to provide each category with individual services or lead to reduced revenue due to members choosing cheaper associate membership options while accessing the same services.

Some organisations cast the membership net even further to include non-agricultural members who are not involved in the industry but join because they feel a bond to the industry, want information or to get access to selected services or benefits. Two examples are the NFU Countryside and the NSWFF Metro Members memberships that are both aimed at tapping into the general public. The potential problem with these types of members is the loss of identity of the organisation and the way these members affect the focus of policies.

Subjective Representation

These are sundry representative organisations that are either think tanks which have no formal membership base or organisations that do have members but do not use a formal democratic process to create policy. They usually have self appointed councils or an administrative board and have weak democratic structures. Although they can produce reasonable policy and add a different perspective to discussions, they are essentially not representative and can be seen to present a set agenda from their ‘profession’.

Structure

Farmer representative organisations are generally not-for-profit and are usually based on either commodity associations (e.g. corn, cattle) or federated councils (farmers unions). They loosely parallel tiers of government and represent their membership either directly or indirectly by affiliation.

Representation Tiers

The levels of representation act like a tiered pyramid of hierarchy that reaches from numerous local groups and builds up to a single main entity. Larger organisations usually have several peaked tiers of management that provide transparency and rigor but they consume resources to administer while the smaller organisations are generally flatter, more streamlined and cheaper to run. The majority of organisations create policy via a democratic process that

moves up the representative tiers and most have staff to assist with this process. The traditional basic tier levels are;

Local (branches or chapters) are the base of the organisation where small local meetings of individual members occur and issues are raised. Generally this is a democratic base where they elect executive positions to run the meetings and each member has one vote with the majority deciding results.

District (county, parish, borough, shire, district or council) are where nominated delegates from local membership branches formally meet to discuss and vote on district issues which are developed into resolutions sometimes with assistance from district or regional staff. Select delegates are elected to executive positions.

Regional (state, province or territory) a body of nominated delegates from the entire regional membership vote on motions (mostly at annual general meetings) which in turn provide policy direction of the organisation. Elected representatives of the membership (mainly from districts tiers) form councils that develop formal policy from resolutions and appoint executives, who with regional staff, pursue objectives.

National (federal) generally delegates from regional executives become member representatives of their region within national organisations that meet to develop national policies and agendas. National organisations generally have dedicated staff.

International (global) affiliations of national organisations provide delegates to promote national agendas in global the arena (largely dealing with trade issues).

Policies

Policies are specific directives to guide present and future operating objectives of an organisation. They generally evolve from motions put forward and voted on by a democratic majority (over 50% of the vote) of members to become resolutions, which are developed into policy and adopted by an executive board. Moving and voting on a motion is one of the greatest powers that membership provides however most members put little value or prestige

to this powerful tool. From discussions it seems that low morale and empathy and the inability to see the bigger picture by members are the greatest barrier of participation.

Constitution

Farmer members generally have limited knowledge about the organisations constitution unless they hold a delegate or executive position. This is entirely understandable especially in old established organisations that have constitutions with contradictory articles and are littered with legal jargon. Simple and concise are the key words to any constitution as it states the reason for being and the system of governance. Amendments to a constitution usually require a 66% or greater majority vote of members.

I strongly encourage that all members become familiar with the basics of the constitution and that it is regularly reviewed to ensure it conforms to legal requirements and is relevant to the everyday operations of the organisation.

Associations

Associations have direct farmer membership and operate independently in a specific geographic area. They are usually either specific commodity groups that focus on issues relating to a defined sector or general groups that cover issues of the whole agricultural industry. Commodity groups tend to have a smaller pool of potential members but they are able to react to a problem relatively quickly compared to general groups that have a diverse pool of members and deal with multi commodity issues. General groups tend to vote as a whole when forming agendas which avoids conflicting policies between commodities but they appear to be quite arduous to administer. Warding delegates is possibly needed to prevent a bias to one area of agriculture and unless there is existing policy in place, greater time maybe required to reach consensus on a contentious issue.

Federations

These organisations can be referred to as umbrella/parent organisation or can be defined as “union of unions”. They either operate on the same tier alongside a collective of specific commodity groups to provide a general policy outlet or a tier above either the commodity or general groups to provide a peak body. Members are a combination of autonomous associations which have comparable policy goals and together create superior political

strength. However, unified representation of diverse commodity and general groups can require constant compromises to reach common ground when developing meaningful policies.

Financing

Regardless of policies, constitution or structure the fact remains that professional representation needs resources which predominately requires funding. Financing any representation organisation is hard but with a decreasing potential farmer membership base this task of gets harder. Most of the organisations visited had their own in-house accounting and they all had external auditing.

Affiliation fees / dues

All voluntary organisations visited had some form of revenue derived from an annual subscription, fee or due. There is generally a minimum fee of membership according to location, size or commodity. For example fees may be determined by a regional area or a formula based on net turnover to correlate to a bracketed fee. In many cases the total reliance on this method involved an aggressive recruitment approach to maintain membership levels which generates revenue. Affiliated memberships to peak body organisations are mainly derived by this method and hence the fees are significant.

Levies / check offs

Levies (otherwise known as check offs) are generally calculated as a percentage of members production sales and are paid in addition to affiliation fees. Some industry bodies collect levies on behalf of representative organisations while most rely on farmer self assessment. Both rely heavily on goodwill with the key problems being the ability to capture all payable levies and that seasonal and commodity fluctuations can drastically reduce income in low production, low commodity price years.

Corporate Sponsorship

Corporate sponsorship is usually used as source of event financing with organisations generally approaching industry to sponsor events in turn for receiving direct access to their membership for advertising. Many believe that if this funding stream is utilised, it is important to try and gain support from a wide number of companies to ensure that no

favouritism or bias can be perceived. There were organisations that do not utilise this source of financing because they promote themselves on independence and hence do not want to be associated with any corporate businesses.

Commercial Operations

Many of the larger representative organisations have quite high running costs due to the amount of services they provide. Therefore these organisations have branched out into commercial operations to generate additional income streams. The most popular enterprises are business services such as insurance and financing. For example the National Farmers Union of the United Kingdom has NFU Mutual which sells insurance and has regionally employed staff. Their time is split into 90% insurance broking and 10% on NFU matters, usually as district secretaries to organise meetings and provide a direct link back to the NFU. Clients do not need to be members of the NFU to access the range of insurance products but a percentage of their insurance premiums still go towards funding the farmer representation operations. Another example is the Farm Bureau Bank which is a wholly owned subsidiary of the FB BankCorp setup by the American Farm Bureau Federation. They also do not require clients to be members of the American Farm Bureau Federation to operate bank accounts however membership may be required to qualify for certain offers, specials and premiums. These benefits easily cover the low cost of membership which starts around \$50US.

The problem which such enterprises face is that if not run appropriately it can damage the core organisation which it was developed to help. For litigation reasons all were run at arm's length to protect the representative organisation and all either directly operated or rented out their name in the branding and hence good will. As people will associate the two entities the risk is that if the commercial arm gets bad publicity then so too will the representative organisation, and vice versa. Another danger is that the focus will change from representation to revenue raising as both organisations' structures increase in size. This could lead to increased bureaucracy and the frustration of members who have adequate services but are not being represented appropriately.

Another avenue of raising revenue is to utilise the wealth of knowledge that resides in these organisations as 'pay for use' services which included finding temporary staffing for farms

and providing basic legal advice. These were usually done by utilising staff in-house but once again the risk of this affecting the core business of representation is present.

Services

The core aim and activity of all farmer representation organisations visited was to lobby for their members interests. These lobbying activities usually benefited all farmers and were not confined just to members therefore many organisations offered additional services to attract new or rewarded loyal members for joining.

Information

The second most important service of all the organisations visited was keeping the membership informed. Obviously the size of the organisation and its resources dictated the quality and quantity of information that was disseminated. Print media still seemed to dominate while electronic media was favoured because of its low cost, however it was generally accessed less. All the organisations visited have some form of regular newsletter and/or a more involved magazine with feature articles on specific issues and up to date industry information. They all had web sites with general facts about their structure and many had a login section specifically for members only with information on policy papers, constitution and feedback forums.

Good quality information about the membership is also a powerful tool. Mailing lists can be tailored to each member's level of involvement and commodity to receive weekly and urgent information about what is happening. Electronic media is the quickest and cheapest means of distributing this information and with the new generation of mobile phone technology, the options are becoming more instant and portable. Also anonymously collecting farm records or surveys from members it can give a clear snapshot of what is happening on a majority of farms which can be used to identify future trends or back up current policy positions.

Access to Benefits and Discounts

Most organisations also had partnerships with selected businesses for which members could receive discounts for goods or services. These includes reduced rates for accommodation, restaurants, personal computers, telephone plans, financial planning and car purchases just to name a few. Memberships may also be taken out to gain access to subsidiary commercial

operations. The integrity of any additional services should always be considered so as to ensure these additional benefits do not comprise the focus or policy of the organisation.

Young Farmers

The vast majority of organisations were fully aware of the importance to attract young people into agriculture and to get them involved within their industries. Most have separate committees for young farmers or are affiliated with young farmer organisations that allow them to contribute their ideas on future farming policies. These young farmers are usually identified as people under the age of either 30 or 35 and the most common issue they focused on was the high costs and difficulties of entering farming.

Some of the European Union member states have compulsory training requirements before young farmers can access start up incentive programs such as cash establishment grants, numerous interest rate subsidies and increased production quotas. Most young farmers join these organisations to gain assistance with applying for such grants.

However I believe the most useful programs that many young farmer organisations offered were based on capacity building of their members through leadership development and an enhanced understanding of their industry. This was achieved through educational programs and study tours while numerous competitive events such as ploughing competitions, round hay bale rolling championships and even being involved with techno parades provided networking opportunities. These are also good opportunities to use their enthusiasm to promote a positive message about farming while raising the importance of agriculture.

Effective Influence

The method of influencing an issue and the people involved can seem fairly basic however the skilful art of lobbying can be very subtle and calculated. The term lobbyist was first used to describe the political wheelers and dealers who frequented hotel lobbies trying to meet politicians to present their views on certain issues. Over the decades this has become a profession of bi-lingual (have the ability to speak to rural, urban, business and government), sharp elbowed, thick skinned individuals who understand that timing is everything while having the ability to utilise any opportunities. Their head offices are usually located near the corresponding powers they wish to influence as to make prompt representation on any issue as the eyes, ears and voice of their constituents.

Most farmer representative organisations visited had elected farmer leaders who are the public “face” of the organisation. These voluntary positions require enormous commitment involving large amounts of time away from their own farming operations while generally only receiving token financial compensation to assist in covering expenses. One French organisation provides agricultural students to carryout work on their representative’s farms while they were attended official duties. This helps the students gain experience for their studies while lessening the burden of the farmers making it more attractive to take on leadership roles.

All the organisations had some form of staff of which the most proficient I met were very professional in their conduct and had an excellent knowledge of not only the issues but how it affected their members. These staff usually had annual training while the senior management promoted a team throughout the organisation. Although amounts were not discussed, many felt that they were not paid appropriately but their passion for the industry kept staff turnover relatively low. Most organisations had an executive officer who was the primary point of contact, managed the office and assisted the farmer leaders with the task of lobbying.

The best lobbyists I met had three simple qualities which gave them the critical key of access. Access mostly refers to the ‘*decision table*’ which is a metaphor for the key people who assist

with making final decisions about certain issues. Without access you cannot get your message across effectively to these people. All the good lobbyists had;

Reputation, Relationships and a Clear Message

A **Reputation** of providing accurate and honest information takes time to establish and ultimately creates credibility and trust. This helps an organisation win acceptance as a '*player*' which in turn provides access to a position of influence. Most organisations would state the year they were established, membership numbers and their successful achievements to gain my attention however I felt that some were solely living off historic successes. A more accurate guide of how well an organisation is achieving its objectives is the willingness of their grass root members to actively support policy.

Relationships developed on an open door approach is a universal tool. Knowing who all the main movers and shakers are is one thing, but they must also acknowledge you are a key '*player*' as well. Although it is almost impossible to have a good working relationship with all parties, it is good to have them in your network. Working on these networks is not only limited to the actual people making the final decision, but also includes key staff and advisers. The best lobbyists I met had extensive networks and some had almost become an extension of the governmental staff. This does not mean that government didn't question the information, but instead they asked trusted the opinions of the lobbyists on a regular basis. In many ways the old adage of, "it's not what you know, it's who you know" is fairly close but "it's what you know, that makes people want to know you" is more apt.

It is also worthy to note that most of the highly articulate lobbyists work on all members of parliament and business, not just the people who are currently in powerful positions. They officially try to maintain political independence and discouraged active involvement in political parties within their ranks. However due to the nature of agriculture most organisations tend to relate more to conservative politics.

The **message** is the final key element I noticed. It is developed by their policies which are formulated into a position or argument and then supported by solid and accurate information. High-quality information ensures that the message matches what is actually happening in the

industry and prevents any hypocritical position being taken. Perception does become reality so having a clear, honest and accurate message is essential.

Good Quality Information

Information is power and the corner stone on which a clear and well represented message is built. Media monitoring was either outsourced or internally undertaken by the larger organisations visited involved collecting and filing all relevant information about events which are particular to their industry, from various media sources, research papers and government processes. This information is then readily accessed to develop strategies around how industry had previously reacted or how a politician had previously voted.

Political Action Committees (PAC's)

It would be remiss not to mention the use of PAC's in US election campaigns. The cost of campaigning for congress begins at around 1 million USD which is mainly sourced by fund raising activities and campaign contributions. Many organisations have established subsidiary PAC's to collect voluntary funds to support various political campaigns using a weighted distribution system based on their historical voting and actions. Most of the organisations who use PAC's said that these contributions didn't buy influence but instead gained them access to the members so that they were in a position to influence

Influencing (pressing the buttons)

Although not admitting it, a goal of most politicians is re-election through delivering good public policy. They continually need to evaluate the decisions they are making which creates the potential for information pressure points. The uncertainty of how policy will perform, and how the public will react, provides the opportunity for organisations to act like a service bureau providing accurate information on how it could affect their constituents.

There are two main aspects of persuasion that should be taken into consideration when trying to influence an issue; the person and the observers (the public). Figure 4 is a very basic diagram that divides the effort put into personal influence and public relations while grouping the main methods used. The personal describes methods used to internally influence a position while the public side is how influence is used externally. Usually both are used in combination so a majority has an overlap. All of the lobbyists I showed this diagram to

agreed that in the middle, with a good combination of personal and public relations, is where most influence is gained over a large number of issues and this area provided the greatest long term relationships and success.

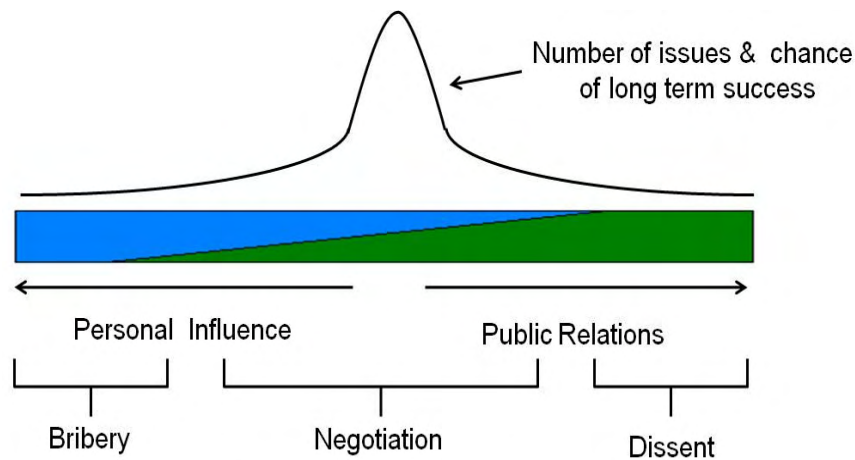


Figure 4. The split between the personal and public side of lobbying methods.

Bribery

According to western culture these methods are considered unethical, illegal and corrupt, and therefore rarely seen by the wider public. Extortion is the extreme method of personal influence by using the threat of physical violence via coercion or intimidation. Blackmailing is only a small step up relying heavily on finding scandalous information to threaten a person's reputation. The more main stream method is to offer inducements usually involving money or favours in order to gain an illicit advantage. Some may argue that in certain situations it is just a cost of doing business and to a lesser extent tipping a waiter or giving a plumber a few beers can be reasoned away. However in the business world, it can cause the loss of reputation and credibility evidenced by the AWB in the oil-for-food saga.

However there is a small amount of etiquette and role playing involved in bribery to prevent humiliating either party which could potentially lead to deepening the trouble. For example the simple phrase "What do we need to do to make this problem go away?" is far better than just handing over some cash to a police officer. It gives both parties some dignity while never really acknowledging the fact that anyone is getting their hands dirty. Even in bribery there is an element of trust that a payment will fix an issue and everyone will keep quiet

about the proceedings. It can become a trap with the threat of blackmail to continue initial payments or the recipient can create more trouble that requires additional payments to be resolved.

Negotiations

Most influence occurs as a blend of internal persuasion and external public pressure. Having comprehensive policies and knowing what your demands and concessions are is critical when entering negotiations. There's no point having such a hard position that you ultimately come out with nothing, instead developing acceptable outcomes that put both parties in a favourable light has more long-term benefits. Doing homework on the people that you wish to influence can give you an insight into their needs and decision making processes which can be used to guide the negotiation process. It is generally better to take the high ground and prevent getting personal in all negotiations as both can greatly affect credibility and reputation. Unfortunately most negotiations involve a lot of "behind the scenes" personal discussions that members and the wider public don't see and therefore conclude that things aren't happening (Figure 4). Communication to members, reassuring them that action is being taken, is hard to sell when confidential discussions cannot be released.

A common argument used by organisations in democratic societies is the "choice" position however it only works if it is consistent across all policies. This argument is mainly used to target public opinion as it is hard to deny anyone reasonable choice whereas your opponent is usually immovable. There are numerous sources of information about methods of negotiating but the best tactics are helped by public momentum, media and good timing.

Dissent

When frustration or a stalemate occurs in the negotiation process, a public flex of power can be used pressuring government as a weapon (strikes or blockades) or more generally to raise public awareness of an issue (marching, protests or demonstrations). These are legal methods of venting dissent but require good membership support and very clear communication to effectively deliver the message of why members are enraged. The use of effective slogans which are catchy and easy to remember assist in generating pride in the cause and makes the issue of why people are protesting easy to understand. Chants like "Eat what you grow, grow what you eat!" can become the message. A poorly run and supported protest, that

deteriorates into violence and has no clear message is ultimately nothing more than a public stunt which can work against the organisers as they can lose creditably.

French farmers have an international reputation of perpetually protesting by blocking highways with burning tractors. So it was a huge surprise to learn that most French organisations prefer to protest in more symbolic ways with banners and good public promotion to get their message across more than shutting down sections of public highways. However there are militant organisations that still use this method but most of the main stream organisations distance themselves from these activities. I believe that without the inherent socialistic values and the strong history of farmer protests these lighter methods wouldn't be as effective now.

Almost every country that I visited had a dedicated militant farmer group that where usually splinter groups formed out of frustration from the major organisations. I believe there is a place for militant action in all organisations so long as it is law abiding and it has an excellent public relations campaign that delivers a clear message about why farmers are protesting.

Image of Agriculture

Some organisations I met loathed the tactics of farmers exploiting the sympathetic idea of the struggling "family farms". This agrarian argument is commonly used because farmers provide the essentials for life and are different to other commercial interests, therefore deserving unquestioning government concessions and financial support. Every farmer I met in the European Union who was subsidised by government felt controlled by government.

The promotion of agriculture prevents the marginalisation of farming in the public sector, however most campaigns fail to promote the business side of farming. In many ways promoting a good image of agriculture can be seen as ensuring we keep our social licence to farm by using real evidence to demonstrate that we are doing a good job as custodians of the environment, whilst utilising best ethical production methods. Most of Australia's private land is managed by farmers and hence besides government, farmers have greatest influence over the environment. I think farmers have failed to capitalise on this point, whilst other pressure groups are promoting themselves as having more interest and knowledge on the

affects of agriculture on environmental issues. Once again good information is should be the base of any promotion of agriculture.

Campaigns

There are always opponents on a range of agricultural issues so farmer organisations need to continually present their case especially in the legislative process. Fortunately there are many steps in these processes with the easiest point of influence through the many committees, commissions, papers and hearings required during legislation development. The best orchestrated lobbying campaigns that I saw had three core activities. Co-ordinating them so that the same strong message is repeated is vital, while the timing on an issue is just as important. Knowing the parliamentary schedule, industry activities and the public's attention span is vital to planning out any campaign. The core campaign activities included;

Public Advertising using all forms of media to influence the wider populations' beliefs.

Many of the larger farmer representation organisations had media departments to carefully create information that positively stimulated public awareness and debate. This takes the form of television advertising and appearances, editorials in metro papers, massive radio promotions and hundreds of general information flyers about farming. A few even hosted agricultural journalist workshops that take the press to the farmers. This works well in highly populated countries but in reality wooing journalists is quite different in Australia. About 60% of stories in the Australian media have their origins in a press release (Fitzgerald, 2006) which means they rely on being fed a proportion of their articles. The attempts to foster relationships between farmers and a metro media are difficult as editors tend to focus on a blend of entertainment and sensationalism to sell papers. Therefore only the odd or unusual stories about agriculture ever reach metro papers and the wider public. This is where some pressure groups excel using stunts to give them public exposure, and potential sympathy to get their message across.

Greenpeace is an excellent example of using personal stories and actively creating controversy to generate media and public interest. Their USA fundraising director claims that they aim to inspire action by using creative communication and confrontation that leaves a lasting impression. Farmers must be aware that their key mantras are campaigning for sustainable agriculture by rejecting genetically engineered organisms, protecting biodiversity

and encouraging socially responsible farming. Although many farmers would agree that the environment and responsible farming is extremely important, they have been reactive in much of this debate.

There is a huge amount of on-line media/cyber-activist momentum that Greenpeace uses to achieve their goal of a *green and peaceful future*. There is no reason why farmers cannot promote themselves as already doing this so long as best practise production techniques are being widely adopted. The fact that Australian food is extremely safe and the environment is a key concern of all farmers is rarely communicated to the wider public in plain language.

Government has the hard task of making decisions especially when they are uncertain about the outcomes. Even though it may not seem it, most political departments are very well resourced and have well formed positions about most issues and how it will affect the public. They also have a good grasp of what most organisations' policies are and therefore what arguments they will use. However they do like to have their position reinforced which does provide opportunities to influence. The aim is to have new information that maintains, alters or revises their initial beliefs according to the campaign that is mounted. Ultimately the decision they make is determined by the information they choose to believe and which to ignore.

One of the major differences between influencing political voting between Australia and the US is that in the US politicians vote independently from their political parties while here voting is generally along party lines. Hence the challenge is to not only target individual members, but to also focus on the caucus cabinet which is where the real political power lies.

Utilising the grass tops of the **Membership** is a powerful tool in delivering a clear and concise message on how an issue is going to affect their business, family and the community. These individuals can be found in the wealth of grass root members and with some briefing to thrash out the key issues, and a bit of confidence, the message can be delivered very succinctly. Face to face contact provides the greatest impact when delivering a message because of the two way communication available giving both parties a chance to gauge each other's responses. Telephone calls and personally written letters are also powerful tools. One way approaches such as petitions are only effective if they have massive support from

the general public while form letters, postcards and generated emails hold less weight but they do get passive members involved.

Understanding Pressure Groups

During my visits most farmer organisations grasped the arguments of opposing pressure groups though few had any inside knowledge of how they work and their planned activities. Formulating rebuttals is easier when it is understood how these opponents are funded and how their policy motivates their actions. The paradox of trying to keep the high ground while getting the dirt on pressure group is a hardline but knowing your foe helps you understand how the battle will be fought.

Measuring Success

The easiest way to measure success is to compare your policy and message against the achieved outcome, however this can be a win at all cost measurement. I believe that a better measure is the willingness of the membership to pay for their representation, general public perception of the industry and the level to which government and industry approach the organisation for opinions and information. If the reputation, relationships and messages are solid then recognition and trust are two good indicators of success as they put you in the position to influence and help your membership. The number of times an organisation is quoted in the media can also give a breakdown of their potential penetration into the distribution demographics.

Global “Gems”

It would be remiss of this report if it did not include a few “gems” of what other organisations were doing to re-engage with the public. This is only a small selection of the leading campaigns and material that I collected during my travels.

School Promotions

Most farmer organisations were aware that pressure groups are attempting to infiltrate schools with emotionally driven messages however a few of the larger, more resourced groups were countering with their own publications. The major French young farmer organisation Jeunes-agriculteurs (JA) created agriculture career posters (Figure 5) that describes all the attributes needed to become a successful farmer and the American Farm Bureau has also created a primary school book about farming and how it affects their everyday life (Figure 6). The United States Department of Agriculture runs a website listings numerous program aimed at helping students gain a greater awareness of the role of agriculture in society and the economy (www.agclassroom.org) while the Minnesota Soybean Association have programs just for children with colouring competitions, clothing and activities (www.mnsoybean.org/programareas/justforkids.cfm).



Figure 5. Jeunes-agriculteurs (JA) Young Farmer careers poster

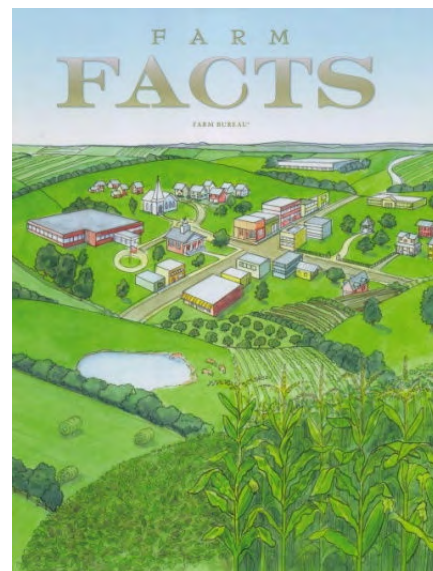


Figure 6. American Farm Bureau Federation Kids Farm Fact book

Stickers

Low cost and very effective, stickers can convey a simple message to the wider public.

While Figure 1 is an excellent example of what farmers are up against, the Federated Farmers of New Zealand have also released their own stickers (Figure 7) with simple messages aimed at promoting farming and having a little bit of fun.



Figure 7. Federated Farmers of New Zealand stickers

Positive Image Promotions

The National Farmers Union UK President, Peter Kendall is inspirational in promoting a positive image of agriculture as dynamic, determined, united and up for the challenge.

Instead of pleading poverty and holding out the begging bowl he is determined that farming is on the front foot with the great message – that farming matters. The NFU UK’s campaign of “Why Farming Matters” (www.whyfarmingmatters.co.uk) is aimed at promoting positive messages about farming to both government and the consumers (Figure 8). Linking Environment And Farming (LEAF) also runs an Open Farm Sunday (www.farmsunday.org) which encourages farmers to invite the public onto their farms as an opportunity to help the public understand what farmers do (Figure 9). Both programs realise that the substance of success begins with changing public perception and the big challenge is to get farmers voices heard.



Figure 8. National Farmers Union UK,
Why Farming Matters brochure

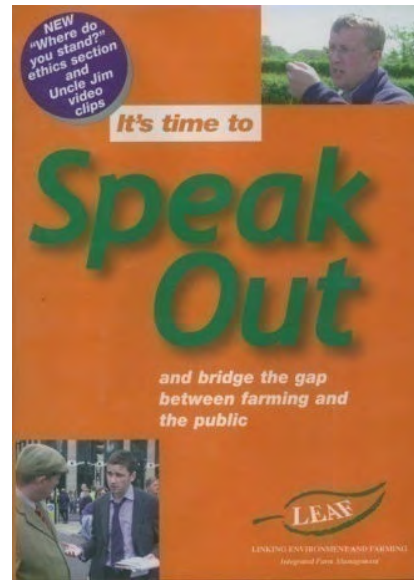


Figure 9. Linking Environment And
Farming (LEAF) DVD on how to run a
Open Farm Sunday on a farm

An example of getting media coverage on television has been the UK's BBC Three programme called Kill it, Cook it, Eat it. It investigated the process of how meat actually came from a farmer's gate to a restaurant's plate. The series created curiosity from the general public about UK meat production instead of invoking emotional responses about animal rights. The key was it demonstrated adopted best practise farming and deliberately didn't hide anything. Another light hearted look at agriculture was UK's BBC Two's car show TopGear which had an episode looking at biofuel. Although not overly accurate it did provide greater awareness and the important role that the famers play with the environment.

Two other quite interesting agricultural aids were LEAF's outdoor Farming Information Boards (Figure 10) and the Meat and Wool New Zealand Compendium of New Zealand Farm Production Statistics (Figure 11). The LEAF boards are particularly designed for paddocks adjoining urban areas or have public foot paths and explain why the farming operations are being carried out. The Compendium of Production Statistics is pocket size and is useful to demonstrate the significant impact the Meat and Wool industry has on the New Zealand economy and keeps farmers up to date on their industry. It is an excellent reference that is cheap and small making broad distribution easy to both farmers and the wider public.



Figure 10. Linking Environment And Farming (LEAF) outdoor Farming Information Boards

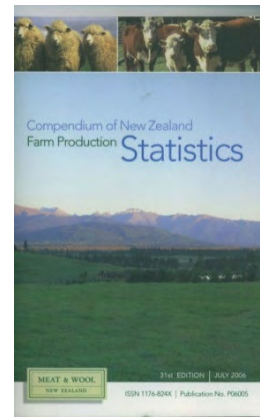


Figure 11. Meat and Wool New Zealand Compendium of New Zealand Farm Production Statistics

However one of the most proactive farmer events that I saw advertised was the Jeunes-agriculteurs (JA) Young Farmer Techno Parade float (Figure 12). JA decided to get a tractor and trailer and use it as a stage at a techno party in Paris called “Save the planet”. They promoted the environmental good that farmers do and gave them a chance for one to one contact with metro youth and counter pressure groups messages.



Figure 12. Jeunes-agriculteurs (JA) Young Famer Techno Parade float

Champaign resources

Finally I would like to mention the 10 thousand rates club which the Federated Farmers of New Zealand (FFNZ) ran, aimed at achieving rural rate differentials and to advocate restraint in shire spending (Figure 13). Any FFNZ member who pays more than 10k NZD in rates became a member of the club which looks for alternative funding sources for local government. It was more the publicity to gain public understanding, rather than the actual government pressure, that gave the greatest benefits. Shires were graded and awarded the worst or best operating in the country according to the FFNZ’s criteria.

Another excellent tool in lobbying for such changes is the VanNess Feldman Congressional Directory (Figure 14) which provides the details of all sitting representatives in the legislative houses of the United States. It provides their personal contact information, staff details and committees they sit on. Although I would hope that this knowledge about staff is standard to all the farmer representative organisations in every country, it is a useful quick reference tool for phone numbers and email addresses.



Figure 13. Federated Farmers of New Zealand 10k Club



Figure 14. VanNess Feldman attorneys at law Congressional Directory 110th Congress / 2007

Conclusion

This is a huge issue and even though this report is fairly general and non prescriptive, it does demonstrate the various options and ways farmers organise themselves to effectively influence their industry. It is quite true that many farmer representation organisations are a source of criticism, however they rely on devoted members who are generally under resourced, volunteering their own time and deal with very complex issues. This is not an excuse to become lax or unprofessional, however it does mean that they cannot always do what larger well funded opponents can. Even the very financial organisations with a strong membership who had unlimited resources still could not please all of their members.

The most successful organisations used strong professional representation through effective lobbying to provide access and influence. The key is acquiring good information then communicating this message to the desired audience. A true measure of how successful any lobbying has been can be measured by how willingly members support the organisation, what is the public perception of the industry and how regularly government wishes to consult with the representative organisation. However good leadership is more than just giving the members what they want but also understanding what they need to survive.

Unfortunately farmers are their own worst enemy when it comes to representing themselves with many personality and policy clashes. There needs to be a mutual obligation to advance agriculture and play the ball and not the man on industry issues. Australian representative organisations and their farmers need to strengthen their reputation, relationships and their message into the future and realise that we are only small producers in a large global marketplace. This may require the rationalisation and consolidation of resources of the representative bodies already working in Australia and look to more non-traditional methods of member contribution and involvement.

I believe that the keys to successful Australian farmer representation include; making sure that farmers are adopting the world's best environment and production practices, that they are proactive in promoting their industry, that total division should be avoided when justifiable dissent occurs and that farmers are prepared to value memberships as an investment in their future not as an annual cost.

Recommendations

My recommendations are directed to the grains industry of Australia and are my own opinions which I formed during my Nuffield experience.

1. Farmers and their organisations need to stop bickering and unify many of their policy positions to prevent their voices becoming irrelevant. They need to stop hankering after the past and look to the future and formalise a plan to get there. The grains industry needs national representation and to understand that consumer's needs and beliefs are changing. A reduction in duplication of organisation is critical into the future as farms become bigger, the pool of farm enterprises gets smaller and external pressure groups possibly become stronger. Potentially a national body with state divisions, local branches and direct farmer membership which is well financed via multiple revenue streams may become the only way to unify grain farmers.
2. Encourage all farmers to join their industry organisation to voice their opinion and to appreciate that the majority and the greater good may not always coincide with their own beliefs. Non members are having a free ride off the farmer good that most representative organisations provide. There needs to be a change in the free beer mentality of farmers who are too willing to receive but are not willing to help fight.
3. Enhance the knowledge of farmers about the lobbying process by providing numerous avenues of education, giving them opportunities to assist with campaigns and keeping them informed on important facts about their industry. This should also focus on developing leadership skills of younger members and encourage the exchange of knowledge from other likeminded organisations via event or study tours.
4. Organisations need strong realistic policy based on rigorous scientific information - without emotional baggage. Any argument needs to be backed up with accurately, and thoroughly researched information. Staff need to be appreciated for what they do and kept motivated on the focus of their work.

5. Good communication to members, government and the public is vital. Public perception is reality and they need to hear the positive messages about our industry. This doesn't mean that we tell everyone that things are always going well, but instead promote the environmental stewardship of farmers, how they are adapting to climate variability and the safety of the products produced.
6. Multiple income streams should be investigated. Commercial enterprises providing services are a common method of generating revenue for numerous organisations which provides them with more resources and makes representation more affordable.
7. Finally farmers need to be proactive about their industry and realise it is up to them to be positive about their own industry. Pressure groups should not be allowed to hold farmers to ransom without being forced to present their alternate agendas.

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Plain English Compendium Summary

Project Title:	How Farmers influence their industry
ANFSA Project No.:	
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Objectives	To investigate how farmers influence their industries
Background	Currently farmer representation in the grains industry is extremely fragmented while an increasing number of pressure groups are gaining in popularity and beginning to influence public beliefs about agriculture.
Research	The research was conducted over 19 weeks which was split into two study tours in an eight month period (February to September) in 2007. This incorporated travelling to New Zealand, USA, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, France, UK, Scotland, Netherlands, Belgium, Spain and Ukraine as well as Australia to interview numerous individuals about the organisations they represent.
Outcomes	The need for farmer representation organisations to unite in the grains industry has been identified and rigorously researched information needs to be used as the key to forming clear messages.
Implications	It is vital that farmer representation unites on major issues to develop a clear message on what is currently happening and how the industry will function into the future. If this does not occur loss of consumer trust and increased legislation to regulate production activates will inevitably be borne by the farming community. Without unity, pressure groups will potentially lead the agricultural debate.
Publications	How Farmers influence their industry, Nuffield Australia, July 2008.

Study topic: How Farmers Influence their Industry

By David Jochinke, - 2006 Nuffield Farming Scholar

- There are an increasing number of pressure groups bombarding the community with emotional views on agricultural issues aimed at changing public opinion.
- If farmers want to take the lead against well organised professional pressure groups, they must first organise themselves in a sensible way and have a clear focus on what they really require.
- Australian grain farmer representation organisations are currently fractured with no united strong national voice delivering a clear message.
- Globally most farmer representative organisations had a declining farmer membership, partly due to the decline in the base number of farmers, but also lack of empathy for the organisations.
- The best representative organisations had three simple qualities of a good **reputation** built on credibility, **relationships** through all levels of the industry and government, and a **strong message** developed from good policy that was supported by high quality information.
- There are three general methods through which effective influence occurs.
 - Bribery – comes in many shades of grey but is generally considered illegal
 - Negotiation – the most common method of achieving influence
 - Dissent – commonly used as a show of force e.g. demonstrations and protesting
- Traditionally media depicts the old agrarian image to exploit the sympathetic idea of the ‘noble struggling farmer’ and fails to promote the environmental stewardship and the business side of agriculture.
- The public’s perception of agriculture needs to change. Farmers need to promote a ‘positive image’ of all agricultural activities using every opportunity to support this message.

Sponsored by: Grains Research and Development Corporation

