



NEW ZEALAND
NUFFIELD
FARMING
SCHOLARSHIP
TRUST

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

How farmers can improve their relationships with non-farmers.

Ali Undorf-Lay

A report to the New Zealand Nuffield Farming Trust 2008

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ABSTRACT

As you drive around the New Zealand countryside it is not uncommon to hear farmers talk about a widening gap between rural and urban people. They say, that the lack of non-farmer understanding of 'all things rural' has led to unrealistic consumer expectations and too much regulation. Farmers are feeling disillusioned by the lack of public encouragement they receive for their industry and are ready to build bridges.

For many urban people, it is increasingly important to understand how natural resources are being used and how the food they buy is grown. Peoples' interest in the environment, animal welfare and food safety has meant they are interested and want to know more about what happens behind the farm gate.

Farming has become public business yet many farmers are quiet people who prefer to stand out of the spot light. In the absence of farmers telling their own story, others have tried to tell it for them and invariably got it wrong; or embellished the ordinariness so as to better meet their own agenda. Untruths and misunderstandings about the adverse affects of agriculture are now widespread. Peoples' expectations and perceptions are out-of-kilter with reality. People on both sides of the debate are beginning to distrust and suspect the worst from each other.

This Nuffield report will discuss how farmers overseas are engaging with the public to more positively shape commonly held perceptions of agriculture. I look for ways that New Zealand farmers can improve their image and how they can extend a welcoming hand to non-farmers. Based on what I saw overseas, I offer ideas about how to encourage more people to stand beside us on the agricultural stage before I set out a plan of actions that we could do in New Zealand to improve our relationships with non-farmers.

The report focuses on areas that I know I can affect through my work at Federated Farmers of New Zealand. In writing it, I have aimed to inspire, excite and engage others in the campaign to "bridge the divide".

Key words; farming, urban-rural gap, perceptions, persuasive politics, story telling, Federated Farmers of New Zealand.

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PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

Being a Nuffield scholar has been an encounter with life. I feel filled with new ideas. I see opportunities where barriers existed before and I have made contacts across the globe.

THE PROJECT

I began this year by making room in my life for the scholarship. I asked my daughter to go flatting, I found tenants for my house, I negotiated five months leave-of-absence from Federated Farmers¹ and I purchased a round-the-world air ticket, a backpack and a Canon camera.

Free from the normal responsibilities of parenting, work and small farm ownership I had the time and space to begin thinking about my Nuffield topic: Bridging the divide; how farmers can improve their relationships with non-farmers’.

As I am an action orientated person my plan in February 2008 was to use my scholarship to come up with ideas on how to tackle the negative perceptions of farming, develop a strategy of action and then propose this to industry in the shape of my Nuffield report.

Eleven months on, I feel good about the ideas that I have developed and confident that they could play a significant role in bringing together farmers and non-farmers. I have found the challenge of writing a strategy for New Zealand agriculture, which builds upon Nuffield experiences, motivating and a pleasurable way to recall my scholarship travels.

THE PROBLEM

In my Nuffield scholarship application my premise was that New Zealand agriculture needed to improve its public image. What ever we were doing, it wasn't working and an increasingly bad public image of farming was hurting us all.

I did not think I needed to prove that in New Zealand tension exists between farmers and non-farmers. I saw evidence of this everyday in newspapers and Environment Court rooms across the country. I learned a similar tension exists in every country I visited.

Almost every farmer I met spontaneously affirmed my study topic as a significant issue for them and told me stories from their own experiences. I have no reason to disbelieve these stories – it is clear that farmers perceive themselves to be misunderstood by their urban neighbours.

Whether this perception is an accurate mirror of reality is a question that I decided not to tackle in the background work to this report. The fact of the matter is that irrespective of what urban people think of farmers, farmers around the world feel misunderstood, threatened and under-valued.

This is a serious global problem and has significant consequences for our industry in terms of future land-use regulation, attracting young people into agricultural careers and how farmers feel about themselves and their work.

One year into my scholarship I am now beginning to understand that the ‘urban-rural’ tension felt by farmers is perhaps only with a small, vocal group of ‘environmentalists’ who have dominated public proceedings. Our industry needs to look beyond these people and begin to talk to the wider community.

One of the simplest ways to be better understood is to become an effective communicator. Good communication, such as farmers telling stories about why they need to do certain things to their land, will help remove the mystery from farming. When non-farming people know why farmers do particular activities there is a possibility that they may also feel less threatened by the activity.

The agricultural industry needs to be better at communicating the farming story and in doing so respond to misinformation being spread about their industry. It is important that we all take responsibility to share knowledge, facts and science of farming and actively reach out towards non-farmers.

¹ I am employed as the provincial support co-ordinator for Federated Farmers of New Zealand.

During my Nuffield travels I practiced and honed my own communication skills by writing a weekly column for The New Zealand Farmers Weekly. This column gave me three valuable experiences: I was forced to think and have a personal opinion about what I saw; I learnt how to express this opinion succinctly in 750 words; and I had a chance to establish my voice in New Zealand agriculture independent from my employer.

BROADENING MY PERSPECTIVE

Scholarship travel gave me distance to look back on what was occurring in New Zealand. I can now see more clearly how loud some minor groups have become; they have taken the moral high ground. I realised what agriculture needs is a strategy to regain the high ground and remind people why farming matters.

A COOPERATIVE CAMPAIGN

My vision for the future is a strategy that would see everyone in the agricultural industry pulling the same rope rather than each of us flying solo because together we can achieve more; working cooperatively sends a stronger public message.

There are models of cooperative and industry-wide public relations strategies overseas that are working well to bridge the gap between farmers and non-farmers. Changes in non-farmers' attitudes to agricultural practices have been surveyed and statistically tracked over time; these surveys show that when urban people reconnect with rural people there is a significant positive trend towards increased understanding and acceptance of farm practices and farmers generally².

A positive public image of farming would benefit everyone in the industry.

LESSON ONE CAME EARLY

I attended the Nuffield Australia spring gathering in February. One of the conference speakers re-introduced me to Maslow's hierarchy of needs and how this plays out in marketing and public relations models. Maslow argues that human beings are similar across all cultures and that a basic trait common to all of us is never to be satisfied with what we have and to always want more³.

Overseas I saw how supermarkets have used this knowledge to create demand for 'new' products simply by repackaging existing products. I wonder if there is a case to be argued for farmers reinventing themselves to the non-farming public, rather than needing to undergo a full blown metamorphosis. In her song writing, Madonna has successfully done this for two decades.

I began to think about Maslow's theory in relation to the environmental movement, which is responsible for creating and maintaining some of the negative perceptions about farming. Maybe, farmers can not hope to satisfy environmentalists, because as a group of human beings their 'environmental wants' are insatiable. So, how then should we respond?

A strategic response to this quandary would be to give less attention to loud minority voices while simultaneously building up support for farming from the wider New Zealand public.

I realise that the agricultural industry has spent too much time reacting instead of being proactive and creative. In the absence of a forum to talk to non-farmers about farming issues we have ignored them. We have accused urban people of being 'anti-farming' without stopping to check out what they really think about us. Just as environmentalists have labelled farmers as vandals; we have incorrectly labelled city folk as anti-farmer. I know that I am guilty of this.

CREATING A CHEERING TEAM

To reach out to more people we need a bigger team. The challenge is how to build this team given that the number of farmers is declining. One way to get bigger is to invite others to join us. We can do this by building relationships with non-farming groups that we have traditionally only met spontaneously or have ignored altogether.

These groups include working with families by linking farming to good healthy food; working with children in classrooms and on farms; linking in with community and service groups.

² In the UK two national organisations FACE, Farming and Countryside Education, and LEAF, Linking Environment and Farming, undertake yearly surveys to track the change in non-farmers' perceptions of farmers.

³ Globe, Frank; *The Third Force: The Psychology of Abraham Maslow*, ReinventingYourself.com, 2004

I have seen overseas how relationships that grow from working with groups like these can create an agricultural cheerleading team far bigger than anything the farming community alone could muster.

These new relationships would have enough positive energy to challenge the negative influence of others.

IT BEGINS EARLY

In every home I went to, across all cultures, small children are positively introduced to farming images through books, songs and games. As an industry we need to find ways that these early childhood farming experiences can be built onto and extended into teenage and adult years. We need to find ways to encourage non-farming children to keep their rural connections into adulthood – as long as these connections are about modern farming and are not simply the romantic images of 100 years ago.

A BASIC ASSUMPTION

People are not blind and will not be fooled. A campaign to promote farming and farmers will only work if we tell the truth, and if we continue to farm in a responsible and sustainable way. At the same time as we reach out to non-farmers we have to ensure that farmers are complying with and excelling in their environmental practices.

New Zealand agriculture is in a perfect place to pitch a public relations campaign. After more than 15 years of responding to the critics we have 'cleaned up our farming practices and our streams'. The vast majority of New Zealand farms are environmentally sustainable.

Farmers know the issues the non-farming public is concerned about and they have the knowledge about how these issues play out on their farms. It is my belief that farmers are tired of challenging the aggressive anti-farming arguments worn thin by the environmental lobby in the Resource Management Act and are now ready to try new ways to respond.

If responding differently was easy, we would have done it a long time ago. As an industry we have to give farmers opportunities, encouragement and confidence to communicate their knowledge and build relationships with others in new ways. Our old ways are clearly ineffectual. To behave differently requires us to be spontaneous, open and flexible.

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

Peoples' perceptions are strongly influenced by the media. Overseas I met with journalists and activists. I sought alternative ways to communicate with non-farmers. I looked at how we can use agricultural and pastoral shows, farm open days, classroom visits and the internet to engage with people.

Internet is a social medium that offers the industry an opportunity to extend its influence across the country and globally. I met an English (Nuffield) farmer⁴ who is excelling with podcasts, websites, social networking sites and blogs. Her influence extends to New Zealand.

We can not rely on the media to spread our story but we can create our own (very influential) media. We need to get our stories across to different groups and ages of people in fun, informative, engaging and practical ways. Overseas there are already tried and trusted ways for doing this; we need only to copy these successes.

BUILDING A BIGGER PLATFORM

While overseas I was hosted for two weeks by the rural churches of England and Wales at the Arthur Rank Centre, an arm of the Royal Agricultural Society of England based at Stoneleigh Park. It was a new experience for me to work with a group of religious ministers that were politically engaged in agriculture.

At Stoneleigh I took a significant step forward in my campaign plan. I realised that I had under-valued our farming and rural community culture and that I should work harder to protect its special characteristics. Rural qualities, like how farmers relate to each other and help out in times of need, are time honoured traditions of civility which are not so evident in modern urban communities. I learnt that it is not only farmers who want to see 'the rural way of life' protected and promoted.

In other countries, non-farming groups have shown a great willingness to join in farming campaigns which also meet their own agendas. There is no reason to suggest that New Zealand non-farming groups would be any different.

⁴ Heather Gorringe: Part two, eassay eleven

THE CONDUIT

I am envisaging that a proactive farming campaign could become the conduit for building an inclusive rural platform where many groups can share a place on the stage.

The campaign needs to have a set of values and a philosophy which people and other groups can share and believe in. People are not willing to sustain a commitment to organisations which are misaligned to their own beliefs.

Linking farming to the environment makes good sense. Farming occurs in the environment; most farmers are environmentalists; farming can enhance the environment. Good farming and good environmentalism can go hand-in-hand.

POSITIVES ATTRACT

New Zealand farmers will only be able to maintain their world class status as food producers if our non-farming neighbours are also successful. Vibrant and enthusiastic groups can not exist in isolation from their community. Everyone stands to benefit when the agricultural industry works in partnership with non-farming groups on a common platform for change.

Overseas I saw how groups who don't traditionally work together were motivated to join forces because they could see that by working collectively, they could achieve their own goals more easily, in a bigger and more successful way than when working alone.

THE AUTHENTIC GROUP

As part of my scholarship travels I attended a six-day experiential training workshop for group facilitators in New York State, USA. The most important thing I learnt, which I think will be a silver bullet in my strategy, is that to build an effective campaign it is essential to be authentic to the group you are working for.

To work authentically means to find the true and genuine way that farmers want to work with non-farmers and vice-versa. My experience suggests that this is not by stomping in the streets and raging in court rooms but by building relationships, sharing and listening to each others' stories, by allowing questions to be asked, by having these questions considered and answered honestly, and by having tangible experiences of doing.

'I learn not by being told but by doing' is a favourite saying of a farmer-friend of mine⁵; in the past I have undervalued this adage. While in Yorkshire I visited with Roger Young, a Nuffield scholar who is a consultant and mediator for an agricultural science company. Roger is convinced that the best way to engage with people, even when tempers run hot, is through action. In real life, he says, passive conversions do not happen.

In America, I learnt to be authentic you have to work between the heart and the head. On the leadership courses I facilitate for Federated Farmers I describe this to farmers as 'what you feel in your gut to be right'. It takes experience and sometimes courage to accurately name your 'gut feeling' and then to be able to act on it.

Overseas I learnt new techniques for engaging with people, connected in some way by people being encouraged to tell better stories. These new ways resonate more strongly with me than arguing in court rooms.

When I arrived back in New Zealand I talked about my ideas of story telling to farmers and I experienced quite strong resistance. I needed to remind myself that if it was easy, we would have done it already.

A SOFT CAMPAIGN

Throughout my travels I was drawn to ideas which I call 'soft'. I Googled 'soft politics' and was surprised to read that Joseph Nye coined the term 'soft power' in the late 1980s to describe the ability of a nation to attract and persuade others by using its culture, political ideals and policies rather than by coercion, military and economic might, which he labelled 'hard power'⁶.

If 'soft politics' makes no collateral damage and there are no ruined relationships in the exchange, then this approach is worth considering.

In the history of New Zealand agriculture the trademark of Federated Farmers has been synonymous with strength, critical comment and sometimes anger; yet this is not how I believe the majority of our individual farmer-members

⁵ Pam Richardson; *Balcarres, Banks Peninsula, New Zealand*

⁶ Book review; *Soft Power* by Joseph S. Nye, Jr., <http://www.futurcasts.com/bookreview6.4>

would chose to express themselves. At the moment I see farmers feeling more 'exhausted' than 'forceful'⁷.

If our industry does not learn how to reveal its true, authentic self to non-farmers and its members then it is unlikely to continue to be able to attract people.

If farmers fail to speak out and explain who they are, others will invent an explanation. In that reinvention they are likely to get farmers and farming wrong⁸. To some extent this has already happened.

STARTING LOCAL BUT THINKING GLOBAL

While in the United States as part of my six week Nuffield Global Focus Tour I became conscious that I was thinking about my work in agricultural politics in a global way. My campaign ideas became bigger than New Zealand. Later, I realised that farmers are comrades not competitors⁹ and that the international agricultural industry also needs to work collaboratively.

There are more advantages than disadvantages to be gained from farmers of the world working together as a global voice. I begin to think about ways to encourage this.

In my travels I saw many good ideas for bringing together farmers and non-farmers. It makes sense that a New Zealand campaign links into successful existing programmes and builds onto them rather than trying to create something new and unique.

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

The words and images which have stayed with me over the past year include:

- Inclusiveness of other groups
- Telling stories
- Cooperation across the industry
- Removing the mystery
- Educating children
- Opening gates
- Explaining farm work
- Welcoming families
- Being positive
- Speaking plain language
- Taking time
- Growing relationships.

These are the ways that I think will bridge the divide between farmers and non-farmers. In part two of this report I explain how I came to these.

⁷ On my travels I took the opportunity to visit many art galleries. The painting that I most stronly connected with hangs in the Belvedere Castle in Vienna, Austria, called *Die erschopfte kraft, Exhausted strength*, it was painted by Ferdinand Georg Waldmuller in 1854. The painting depicts the hard reality of farming life with total frankness. A peaceful child sleeps while it's barely noticable mother has collapsed on the farmhouse floor lit by a solitary candle. The painting reminded me New Zealand faremrs today, many of whom are battle weary yet invisible. A photograph of this painting can be seen in Appendix One of this report.

⁸ Dorothy Baldwin Satten, *Real is Better Than Perfect*, Hopedancing Publications 2006

⁹ Rev. Gordon Gatwick, Arthur Rank Centre in personal communication with me, August 2008

PART TWO: ESSAYS

In this part of my Nuffield report I have written 15 essays.

Each essay begins by telling a story of a conversation I had while on my Nuffield trip. We I can I offer a photograph of the storyteller. Unfortunately I didn't always have my camera with me.

Some of the stories are shortened versions of newspaper articles published as part of my New Zealand Farmers Weekly column. Some stories are new; there are more untold stories that will come out in time. These stories helped me form my thinking on bridging the divide, they excited and expanded me.

The stories weren't always available just because I asked for them. In many cases I only had access to them because I was a Nuffield scholar; sometimes it was because of my earlier background as an environmental advocate or because of my current work at Federated Farmers.

After each story I share some thoughts about why I chose to include this particular story and what it has meant to me. The story and my thoughts make up the essay.

The essays read together support part one of this report and provide the platform to launch the strategy ideas in part three.

ESSAY ONE

Phil Gorringe - Farmer Phil



I spent a couple of hours with Phil Gorringe and his son Monty looping around the paddock in his 'header' as he harvested their wheat crop. We talked about his public profile on the 'Wiggly Wiggles' website as 'Farmer Phil' and how he grew into the job of being the farmer that non-farming people (around the world) could ask questions to. Farmer Phil is our rural equivalent to Dear Abby.

Phil explains, and sometimes defends, farming practices to non-farming folk. He's popular and people really like asking him questions. I asked him what the most important thing to remember when he blogs on farming matters and he replied by saying, "To be honest. If I don't know the answer, I don't pretend to know. I tell it like it is. If an animal needs to be killed or die I won't hide this from people. I'll explain that I spray, how I spray and what I am aiming to achieve from the spray". Phil believes that people need to know the truth and have enough information to make up their own minds. He told me he speaks up to provide a balance to the debate.

Being a high profile www.farmer is probably not the job that Phil would have chosen for himself, but try finding another farmer in England who manages to sell their hay in one kilo bags!

The topic of the moment on the web when I was with Phil was, "Do cows sleep facing the magnetic north pole"? I found the question ridiculous but Phil answered peoples' enquiries honestly and with consideration. When I asked him where he gets his ideas from, he said, "From attending farm discussion groups and reading farming newspapers".

Phil Gorringe is a real farmer who is out there in the social networking world of internet, blogs and podcasts bridging the divide between rural and urban. His rural diary of farm life helps people make a connection between events on the land and the food for sale in their supermarket.

He is telling stories about farming and explaining his practices in an open and honest way.

ESSAY TWO

Guy Smith - Speaking up



Guy Smith is a farmer, a journalist and an active member of the National Farmers Union (NFU) for England and Wales. He is determined to tell a positive farming story to the public, which is why when I met up with him he had his head in his hands. British farmers have been on the TV all summer bemoaning the weather, their lost crops and the hard winter ahead. Guy dislikes this kind of media coverage. He says, "It's no surprise that young people don't want to go farming when all they hear are despairing stories".

Guy writes prolifically. I asked him what motivates him and he said, "That his goal is to reach both farmers and non-farmers and always repeat the same message,

British farmers are clean, kind, green and caring". Guy thinks that the farming industry needs to take responsibility for the public's ignorance about farming, "It is farmers' fault that the consumer doesn't understand how food is produced and why certain things are done to the land". Guy advocates that it is the responsibility of the industry not the media to communicate better and educate non-farmers. He told me, "Farmers need to be upbeat, focused on good stories that send strong messages to children and parents explaining, justifying and celebrating British agriculture".

Guy is a good story teller. When I read his writing I understand that what he does particularly well is to remove the mystery from farming. He explains in easy to understand language what farmers are doing to the environment, why and what some of the consequences of their actions are to the soil, birds and landscapes. He told me that he wants to remove the fear and prejudices that non-farming people have about farming and make farming familiar.

I wonder what it is, that triggers a negative perception about farming?

If negativity arises in response to fear, then removing the mystery from farming practices by telling people what farmers are doing is crucial to the process of bridging the urban-rural divide. If people know the truth, it is less likely that myths creep in.

One of the recognised ways to encourage people to be more receptive to new ideas is by having high profile people show an interest in the issues and by explaining how a change to their thinking might help them personally. Guy Smith's articles do both these things well.

ESSAY THREE

William Goodwin - Unintended consequences



When William Goodwin's Dad, Danny, started farming he had four cows which he milked by hand. A man used to making progress quickly, two weeks later he increased the size of his herd by 250 percent after a visit to the local stock yards.

Like father, like son. William responded swiftly when his younger brother James came back to the family farm 10 years ago. They increased their production to support another family by upsizing the dairy herd from 250 to 700 cows, leasing and buying land and putting more emphasis into their off-farm contracting business and property developments. Their additional cows, Friesian/Holstein crosses, were imported from Holland.

I meet William on my Nuffield Australia farm tour back in February this year. He was the 'silver fox' of the UK scholar team. His study topic is genetic modification. William told me that an unintended consequence of the European Union's banning of common herbicides means that his on-farm silage production will drop by about 30 percent. His business can not sustain this – they are not earning enough from their milk sales to buy in the deficit silage lost through the chemical restrictions. In addition, silage is likely to rise in price due to increased demand and reduced supply.

William's response to his decreased production is to change to genetically modified seed sources which will have a natural immune to the plant diseases he was spraying for. He feels he has no option; he is unwilling to increase his herd numbers.

The European Union ban on the use of many common chemicals has pushed farmers like William towards genetic modification. This unexpected outcome is a good example of the 'law of unintended consequence', which suggests that that actions of governments will always have unexpected and unanticipated affects¹⁰.

William's desire, to compensate for his lost stock food production as a result of the ban on some chemicals by switching to genetically modified seed sources, is the story that needs to be told to the public as part of the policy debate.

In my view the job of explaining how this ban on the use of certain chemicals will affect farmers' practices and food production is the responsibility of the farming community not the media. It is our story, we must tell it. Even though William will not be able to grow genetically modified crops until the government relaxes its attitudes, the public should be informed of the responses that farmers are considering.

In a recent email discussion I had with UK rural journalist, Ian Howey¹¹, about the chemical ban, he told me, "Unfortunately while it looks as though there was a softening of attitudes about chemical use earlier in the year there has now been a u-turn. Some ground has been won, but it is far from what is desirable and the imminent vote in the EU is likely to bring in a ban on many products, if not immediately in the next five years."

William has some respite, which now gives him time to tell his story.

ESSAY FOUR

Chris McCann - A license to produce

I met up with Chris McCann, a UK Nuffield scholar, in Leeds. He is the ethical buyer for Asda, one of the 'big four' UK supermarkets¹². We met up in the staff cafeteria of Asda's UK headquarters.

The meeting began by me telling Chris some stories about New Zealand and the problems that farmers were having with their image; he was surprised and questioned me why non-farming people were anti-farming. He said, "New Zealand farmers offered their customers' terrific value for money and New Zealand people could afford to buy healthy food at a good price because of farmers' efforts – why then don't people like farmers?"

Chris expressed surprise that urban people were reluctant to support their rural counterpart given the value for money advantage and the fact that New Zealand farmers add significantly to the country's GDP while at the same time as meeting high standards such as animal welfare, responsible use of chemicals/ pesticides etc.

Later Chris wrote me an email and said, "Maybe New Zealand farmers have lost their licence to produce and that the non-farming public no longer trusts farmers to be relied on to manage their land and produce good food without regulation?"

As I left Leeds, I knew that I had found another answer to my question about how to bridge the divide. I needed to find ways for farmers to regain non-farmers trust (and win back the moral high ground).

¹⁰ Rob Norton, "Unintended Consequences." *The Concise Encyclopaedia of Economics* 2008. *Library of Economics and Liberty*. 23 January 2009. <http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/UnintendedConsequences.html>

¹¹ Ali Undorf in personal communications with Ian Howie, January 2009

¹² Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury's and Morrisons have a combined share of 73% of the UK grocery market, Wikipedia January 2009

In New Zealand local government has carved a role for itself as the environmental protection agency. Almost without exception, councils have regulated land and water use and now require farmers to obtain resource consent for common farming practices.

Farmers often feel that they are no longer trusted to make sustainable decisions about their land.

From my years as a resource management planner I know that the cry for increased council regulation of farming practices is most often heard coming from two or three environmental groups (and sometimes from council staff). Few other interest groups or people engage in local and regional planning processes. Most people in our communities seem willing to leave these decisions up to others, and environmentalists have filled the void.

While environmentalists may have loud voices their voice is not necessarily expressing the majority view. Many urban people are environmentalists (just as many farmers are) yet I suspect that not many of them would be familiar with the views being expressed by some environmental groups, on their behalf, in our Environmental Court rooms.

The perception that farmers can no longer be trusted to look after their environment justifies the council 'waving their stick'. It becomes a self-perpetuating myth; the less farmers are trusted the more regulatory control will be imposed. Yet, New Zealand farmers if left alone have responded responsibly. Queen Elizabeth II Trust is an excellent example of a farmer initiative to protect native bush on private land. It was there long before the Resource Management s6(c) requirement was placed on councils¹³.

The challenge for opponents of increased regulation (like Federated Farmers, who see it as an unnecessary compliance cost) is to find ways to demonstrate to non-farmers that landowners can be trusted and that the farming industry has environmental, animal welfare and food safety issues under control.

Thinking back to the earlier essays in part two of this report, I realise that an effective way to communicate the message 'you can trust us' is to put a human face on the New Zealand farmer. Personal stories are persuasive because they connect the teller and the listener to a real situation, and both sides can negotiate their way to understanding through questions and answers as part of their dialogue.

My first four essays have all reached the same conclusion – farmers need to tell more stories. This surprises me because it feels almost too simplistic.

ESSAY FIVE

The British Potato Council – Become a farmer



The British Potato Council offers schools throughout England and Wales the opportunity to take part in a 'grow your own potato' project. In 2007 more than 6000 schools grew potatoes. The aim of the project is to provide an easy and interactive way for teachers to focus their students' learning on how things grow, where food comes from and the importance of a healthy and balanced diet.

Depending on their location, classes can grow their potato in a vegetable garden or as a pot plant on their classroom window sill. The Potato Council guides the students through planting, watering, harvesting and cooking. A potato-cam on the Potato Council's website encourages schools to compare their plant's progress with one grown by an expert.

Encouraging and teaching children to grow their own food is a fun and interactive way for the potato industry to pass on knowledge of its product. It provides an opportunity for the Potato Council to demonstrate its 'growing' expertise and children get to experience being farmers.

¹³ Section 6(c) of the Resource Management Act requires as a matter of national importance that significant natural areas are recognised and protected

In my own life, when I have been challenged with new or conflicting information I know that I am more receptive if I am given an opportunity to experience both sides of the debate and have time to reach my own conclusions. Understanding I reach under my own steam is more likely to be enduring. I know that fact alone seldom wins an argument or converts unbelievers.

It would be a powerful coalition if farmers and non-farmers could come together as one voice. This could be achievable if the understanding and aims of both sides were similar; such as, farmers can protect the environment while working their land effectively and profitably.

Role-play gives an opportunity for one side to experience the perspective of the other. By encouraging children in class rooms to become potato farmers they get to experience and make some of the decisions that real farmers have to make in their paddock – like when to water and how much water to use. If a child that has a chance to role-reverse with a farmer they are more likely in the future to have an understanding what it is like for the farmer when they see their crop wilt or conversely, struggle when it gets too much water.

Role-reversing, by putting ourselves in the other person's shoes and experiencing life from their perspective, is a good way to gain understanding and empathy of different viewpoints.

If farmers put themselves in the shoes of non-farmers, and imagined how a non-farmer would respond to something they saw happening on the land but didn't understand why it was being done, they would get to experience both sides of the issue. This would be a good start for building bridges.

ESSAY SIX

Stephen Watkins - Almost perfect



As soon as the ground dries out these carrots, grown by Stephen Watkins in Worcestershire, are going to be ploughed in. I know that they taste great because a Nuffield friend ate one. The bad weather in England and the very wet ground conditions has delayed harvest and the carrots are now too big for the discerning supermarket buyers; tasty, but not perfect for the consumer.

Back in February of this year I visited Australia as part of my first overseas Nuffield experience. Mick Keegan, from the Australia Farm Institute, in his presentation to the Nuffield conference made a connection between the American psychologist Abraham Maslow and the supermarket product range.

Maslow's theory, called the 'Hierarchy of human needs', argues that each of us irrespective of our culture and economic power is born with a set of basic needs (food, shelter, warmth). When these needs are met higher needs emerge; when these needs are satisfied, yet higher needs emerge. Maslow's premise is that a basic human need of all people is to have insatiable wants.

Stephen's carrots are good examples of Maslow's hierarchy. In the supermarkets' chase for market supremacy they seek a point of difference so that they can sell what is essentially the same product but at a different price to their competitor. Cheap carrots are store brand; within the next four years the high-end carrot will probably be guaranteed carbon neutral and organic.

While travelling I thought back to my days when most of my working life was spent in the Environment Court arguing over district and regional plans. I realise that environmental groups also have insatiable wants. Irrespective of what concessions farmers make, they may never satisfy their critics.

There needs to be a new way to respond to groups like the Department of Conservation and Forest & Bird as continual court battles are unsustainable for us, and them.

What then? No longer engaging in these debates is not the answer – the challenge has to be in finding a new way to respond.

ESSAY SEVEN

Ann Hale and Donna Little - Persuasive = authentic



In July I travelled to up-state New York, USA, to work on my interpersonal relationships. I had decided to use some of my Nuffield scholarship money to enrol in a six day psychotherapy workshop for group trainers run by Ann Hale and Donna Little.

It seemed to me that many farmers' connections with urban people had been significantly damaged so that any campaign I came up with wasn't beginning on neutral ground. Agricultural politics can be brutal and farmers often find themselves at the beaten end of the wedge fighting government, councils and environmentalists. There is a role for the fighting warrior in these exchanges but not always. I knew I needed to find new ways to respond.

In life we can not run away when times get difficult. Our homes and farms keep us tied to one spot. Our communities are small places where we can not help but meet the same people over and over again. We either have to start being seen in different ways or we will continue to fall into old patterns of behaviour.

At this workshop I realised that any move away from habitual responses, such as defensive denial, would only come about if farmers could make honest connections with non-farmers, and in these moments share their views and beliefs.

We will need to create opportunities for genuine moments of intimacy to occur so that farmers can tell their stories and explain their practices.

At the workshop I saw a role for myself as a conduit, a link between two sides. The challenge for me is how to create intimate moments on a grand scale so as to change the view of many people rather than one or two at a time.

ESSAY EIGHT

Bruce Gilbert - Building rapport to establish trust



Bruce Gilbert is a farmer in Ledbury, Herefordshire, who has been adopted by his local school. Twenty-five farmers offered themselves for selection. Bruce was chosen. As part of the adoption he invited the children to his farm. He wants to encourage them to write him emails with questions. He told me, "It feels good to have the opportunity to meet children as a farmer and explain how I work the land and why."

Adopt a farmer is a UK Year of Food and Farming project aimed at primary school children. It aims to give young children direct contact with a farmer. For Bruce, it gives him a way to positively connect with children in his area and to be the local face of farming. He told me that he hopes, "A good relationship with the children can go on to become a good relationship with their parents".

I remember that I enjoyed meeting Bruce. He was positive, enthusiastic and good at telling stories that kept me entertained. Even though I have few skills with animals I enjoyed helping him bring in his cattle for their blue tongue vaccinations. I can still remember how difficult it was droving them along the narrow roads and past the village

houses with no fences. When I left Bruce's place I felt more informed about his farm and what it was like to be a UK farmer than at any other farm I visited. The difference was helping him with his work.

The 'adopt a farmer' campaign creates an opportunity for farmers to build rapport with non-farming children. It also encourages the farmers to make personal connections with children in their community as an 'expert'.

Bruce's year long relationship with his local school gives him both the time and the opportunity to gain the trust and respect of the children. He told me that he viewed being 'adopted' as a great way to link together his family, his work and his community.

I read up on some ideas for building rapport because I know it is a prerequisite to building trust. Buskist and Saville, describe rapport as being 'an alliance built up on trust that grows from many small experiences rather than one single act'¹⁴.

The adage 'good relationships take time' comes to me. To create a relationship with the children Bruce has had to ignite in each child an interest in farming. He told me that one of the ways he has done this is by hosting a 'mini beast hunt' through his fields. Children are given jars and a magnify glass with instructions to explore low to the ground and catch what they find.

Building up trust so that people can hear what farmers have to say with an open mind will be the key to achieving a positive alliance with non-farmers. To get to a relationship of trust we need to start by building rapport.

Buskist and Saville provided some ideas for teachers wanting to build rapport in their classroom. I have adapted their tips so that they can apply to situations where farmers host visiting groups on their farms.

- Call your visitors by name.
- Ask questions so as to learn something about their interests and views.
- Create and use personally relevant examples.
- Chat with people as you walk around.
- Explain your farm policies - why they are what they are.
- Let people know when and how you can be contacted later.
- Use e-mail to increase your accessibility.
- Interact more, lecture less and emphasise learning by doing.
- Reward visitors' comments and questions with verbal praise.
- Be enthusiastic about farming and passionate about your farm.
- Lighten up - crack a joke now and then.
- Be humble and, when appropriate, self-critical.
- Make eye contact with each person without staring, glaring or flaring.
- Be respectful.
- When all else fails, smile - others will think you like them and your job.

These tips alone will not build rapport between town and country. We need combinations of these behaviours used consistently over time by many farmers.

Building rapport and trust with groups that we don't normally work with is a good way for us to build up our cheering team.

¹⁴ William Buskist and Bryan K. Saville; *Rapport-Building: Creating Positive Emotional Contexts for Enhancing Teaching and Learning*, Auburn University www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/getArticle.

ESSAY NINE

Carolyn Drummond - A window opens



It's hard to imagine what it looks like when 150,000 people descend on 450 British farms on the first Sunday of June every year wearing gumboots and out to have a good time, but this is exactly what happens with the LEAF 'Open Farm Sunday' initiative.

LEAF stands for Linking Environment and Farming. It's been around since 1991 and enthusiasm for its work has snowballed. I meet Carolyn Drummond, who is the chief executive of LEAF. She gave me a great pile of resources and ideas to take home. I found her enthusiastic, supportive and practical. I also stayed a night with LEAF Trustee, Gordon Gatward, and spent several days visiting LEAF farmers. To be frank, I got hooked.

In the UK everyone speaks highly of Open Farm Sunday. It seems to be the most positive and supported initiative UK farmers have developed to bridge their own rural-urban divide. Even from my short visit to the UK I could see that LEAF has had a beneficial effect on many farmers' land management practices such as by encouraging farmers to use integrated farm and crop management tools. The ways that LEAF has given their work publicity both within and outside the farming community has been great for public relations. While Farm Sunday is only a relatively small part of the LEAF effort, it is their most visible success.

Carolyn told me, "LEAF was set up by a group to close the gap between consumers and farmers and tries to understand both sides of the debate. All LEAF farmers are committed to a viable agriculture which is environmentally and socially responsible. They want to ensure the British public has a continuous supply of safe affordable food while conserving and enhancing the fabric and wildlife of the British Countryside for future generations".

I liked the Open Farm Sunday concept so much that I decided to promote it once I got back to New Zealand but even I was surprised when the National Council of Federated Farmers unanimously supported hosting their version, FARM DAY, on 1 March 2009 after only ten minutes discussion. Voting was enthusiastic and council members speaking to the remit said, "That they saw FARM DAY as a very practical and friendly way to build a relationship with non-farmers."

Sometimes things seem predestined to happen if you can pick the right time to put a proposal forward. I had promoted the idea of hosting open days for non-farmers for several years with little uptake; this time things came together with seemingly little effort.

In policy terms, the right moment to push an idea to the front is called identifying 'a window of opportunity'. In the convergence of people becoming aware of a problem, finding a solution and a growing willingness to move away from old patterns of behaviour, an opportunity (or window) for a new response occurs.

Politics is about being able to recognise when a window is about to open and being quick enough on your feet to use this opportunity to push for change.

The Federated Farmers National Council proved to be a convergence point. Council members knew that there was a growing problem with urban perceptions of farming, simultaneously they saw FARM DAY as a way to talk to non-farmers, and they understood that they had to do something different because they could see what they were doing wasn't working.

It might be, and I would like to think that it was, partly because my six month series of Farmers Weekly columns describing my travel experiences that had encouraged our farming leaders to try something different.

It is also probable, that Federated Farmers FARM DAY resonates with the way that New Zealand farmers feel most comfortable relating to non-farmers. Showing people around their farm in a fun and friendly way feels the right, real and genuine way for farmers to meet non-farmers.

ESSAY TEN

John Plumb - A creative response



LEAF farmer John Plumb can't count the number of neighbours on his farm boundary but it is in the thousands. With 75 primary schools within five miles of his land many of his farming neighbours thought he was reckless when he decided to adopt an open-farm policy and welcome the public onto his place 24/7.

John defines himself as a tenant farmer and an environmental steward. The two roles are well integrated into his life. As part of an environmental stewardship programme John has embraced the open farm philosophy. He hosts school days, open farm days and takes groups of people for guided walks around the farm. He is paid £100 for every group visit.

After a rocky start, largely because the non-farming people on his farm boundary didn't like change, John has managed to get people in his community to be enthusiastic about his vision (except perhaps other farmers in the area).

What's in it for John? European Union financial compensation for the enlarged set-aside areas, for his flower meadows and for providing public access.

Having 'inexperienced' people on your farm is hard work; they take up time and create extra work. It is clearly not a calling that all farmers would want to hear.

Being compensated for the effort is important. It is a concrete way to put a value on the time and cost involved in having people on your farm – and for John it has meant the difference of keeping or losing his tenanted land. Unable to profitably farm dairy cows he has learnt to adapt and now manages his land for people.

ESSAY ELEVEN

Heather Gorringe - www.wigglywiggles



Heather owns Wiggly Wiggles, which is an internet mail-order company for all things to do with birds and compost. On her website, she runs a second arm to the business which is to translate farmers' land and crop practices into urban 'gardener' speak.

Wiggly Wiggles has become an influential, farming public relations company (and is the 2008 global winner of the Dell small business award). Heather uses her social media forums to facilitate internet discussions on punchy and contentious rural issues like chemical use and Tb in badgers. She aims to dispel rural myths by tackling the negative urban perceptions head on with generosity of spirit, openness, humour, facts, information and alternative viewpoints.

I spent the day with Heather and her husband Farmer Phil and son Monty, see also essay one. I had a quick conversion to social media and found another silver bullet – how to exchange open, spontaneous, honest, personal authentic ideas between farmers and non-farmers in a global forum.

Heather is a UK Nuffield scholar. She told me that she was, “Convinced that farmers have forgotten how to talk and for too long have blamed everyone else for their problems; and conversely the urban public had forgotten that their enjoyment to walk across farm land and to eat good quality food is thanks to the farmers.”

Heather told me that she sees her job as bringing these two sides together. She does it exceptionally well and I left excited.

I now have a Facebook site, a video camera and am looking for farmers who want to make podcasts with me. I heard Heather say, “You must not talk to people, you must chat with them.”

Interested? Join me, 0800 327 646 or email: aundorflay@fedfarm.org.nz

ESSAY TWELVE

Graham Jones - Building a bigger platform



Graham Jones visited me in New Zealand back in January 2008 when he came to New Zealand to study the relationship and connections between the church and the rural community. We found out that we share similar views about building community and supporting rural people. When he returned home he invited me to the Arthur Rank Centre at Stoneleigh Park, the home of the Royal Agricultural Society.

Going to the Arthur Rank Centre and discovering that the church was a passionate rural advocate that wants to actively engage with others politically has been a surprise. In the UK, the church is prepared to stand beside farmers on such things as supermarket fair trading relationships with local producers, farm regulation and

the government's treatment of farmers, rural isolation and farmers' standard of living. His church is working hard to connect with rural people far beyond its congregation and into areas, which in New Zealand anyway, are not traditionally considered as pastoral care. I was intrigued (and envious).

It was a new experience for me to work with a group of religious ministers that are politically engaged in agriculture. I didn't expect them to be so interested in farmers' issues. When I came back to New Zealand I found that I still had many questions.

I have been emailing Graham and asking him about the connection between the church and farming and what this has to do with God, and what his views are about the role of ministers in politics.

My thinking is being driven by a desire to encourage in New Zealand a wider representation of people to enter some of the environmental debates that seem to rip our communities apart, like minimum flows on rivers and the amount of water that can be abstracted for irrigation.

Graham answers my questions fully and I quickly realised I needed to be more courageous and to have my discussion with Graham on Facebook so that others can also contribute their ideas. If I did this, it would mean that I was putting into action my learning gained from spending a day with Heather at Wiggly Wiggles .

It has been disappointing that the Royal Agricultural Society of England and Wales will not let its staff access Facebook. In effect, their distrust of staff discretion has blocked our conversation – and maybe my conversion.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

Jasna Sonne - Positives attract



I travelled to Turkey to catch up with Jasna Sonne, a friend from my student days. Back in the eighties we did environmental politics together and we both continue to be politically active.

We discussed ways to bring environmentalists and farmers together onto the same platform and how to make politics more engaging for people who have remained outside of the public debate until now.

It has become clear to me that New Zealand farmers will only be able to maintain their world class status as food producers if our non-farming neighbours are also successful. Farmers can not prosper in isolation from others in the community.

We need a strong healthy city if we are to have a creative and innovative hinterland. It is not a weakness but a strength to be able to work collaboratively with others.

I believe, sometimes to the incredulous surprise of others, that my work as an environmentalist is not separate from my work as a farmer advocate. Jasna reinforces this.

I realise I need to find a public way to articulate both sides of my political viewpoint.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

Julia Evans - Two birds, one stone



Julia Evans is the immediate past chairman of the Herefordshire County Branch of the National Farmers Union, NFU. She is passionate, positive and very energetic when bringing together urban and rural people. Her most recent project is promoting her own style of the UK Farmhouse Breakfast. She also makes great efforts to draw attention to the need to resolve the problem of Bovine tuberculosis, by allowing badgers to be culled in hot-spot areas. Culling is being hampered by the Government's refusal to issue licenses.

Farmhouse Breakfast happens each January and is part of a nation-wide initiative to raise money for charity. Some people cook, and others pay to eat. Julie has put

a local twist on the breakfasts cooked in her area and uses them as an opportunity for local farmers to invite their neighbouring villagers in for a meal.

The farmers cook and serve breakfast from food they have grown. Julia sees these breakfasts as a forum for farmers to promote their local products and to answer questions about the food they have grown. She designed 'Ask me I'm a farmer' badges, pictured in the photo. Farmers wear these badges as they cook and serve breakfast because she wants to invite and encourage questions and dialogue.

For a short time Julia wondered if the farmers would resist the idea but it turns out that in kitchens and the dining rooms people have responded enthusiastically. Over the past three years Julia's NFU branch has raised over £30,000 for local charities plus she is convinced that farmers' relationships with their neighbouring villagers has improved.

In December of this year, Federated Farmers of New Zealand agreed to place a purchase order for 2000 'Ask me I am a farmer' badges. There was strong agreement in the organisation that these badges were a friendly, inviting way to show the farmer was an expert and to invite questions.

We will give 50 badges to each farm hosting a FARM DAY event on March 1 and use the rest at our field day stands.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

Scott Allison, Born from the ashes of protest



The Ontario 'Farmers Feed Cities' campaign is a great example of a grassroots action group that walks its talk. Beginning as the words on a protest placard the 'Farmers Feed Cities' campaign focuses on creating opportunities to promote farming in ways that positively connect non-farming people to farmers.

The campaign is no longer about protesting but they do encourage people to turn their cities yellow. It has been running for five years as a positive response to farmers feeling frustrated and ignored by people in their cities. Ontario farmers felt that their efforts to produce good, healthy food was not being recognised and they wanted to do something about it.

I meet Scott Allison, the campaign organiser, in Toronto. We talked about the campaign and why the farmers were so keen to speak out for agriculture. He said, "Canadian farmers are proud of their agricultural history and achievements and wanted to ensure they have opportunities to talk about what they are doing. They don't wait until they have to defend farmers from urban criticism but are proactive in making opportunities to celebrate agriculture."

It is not easy to be proactive and positive when the behaviour that most people expect to see from you is that of the 'critical commentator'. Even if farmers in New Zealand could shed their role of the 'critic' there is the question of who would fill the void. In Ontario the farmer's resolved this dilemma by creating a new, independent group, which sits outside of existing farmers' lobby groups and is totally dedicated to positive, public relations.

While I am attracted to the idea of creating a group dedicated to being pro-active I believe that there could be a danger in splitting the roles of 'critical commentator' and 'positive community-builder' into separate organisations. A negative group can viewed as too difficult, become isolated and then easily ignored.

It feels almost inevitable that Federated Farmers would become the critic because it is the role that we are most familiar with and others expect of us; yet the more creative and exciting challenge is to become the group which extends out its hand to others.

Federated Farmers FARM DAY is a great way for us to practice this new public role.

PART THREE: A STRATEGY FOR ACTION

INTRODUCTION

In part one of this report I set out my learning. In part two I told stories about some of the people I met that were influential in my travels. In this final section of the report I draw together all my experiences and offer some concrete ways New Zealand farmers can extend a welcoming hand to non-farmers, and in doing so begin to bridge the divide.

Through travelling, I learnt that farmers around the world share similar values and that irrespective of where they farm - on communal land in China or a cooperate farm in the United States - they experience many of the same pressures that New Zealand farmers are telling me about. Farmers around the world feel threatened, under-valued and misunderstood. They told me they were convinced it was because urban people did not like them. In our defensiveness we stopped talking.

For farmers, their perception of an urban-rural divide is real and global.

I realise that local versions of global problems do not need 'unique' solutions; it makes sense to learn from others. Borrowing ideas from overseas is easier than thinking up new ways to respond and it will help build international fellowship between farmer groups.

Across all countries there is a need to convince farmers that they should tell their story, most do not realise the importance of doing so. Farmers need to be able to present the true rural facts to their local community; to councils, politicians and decision makers who often choose to believe the scaremongering stories of loud voices than truth and reality (and ordinariness).

To bring order to this section of the report I have organised my ideas into three categories:

- Campaigns – big ideas for mass action.
- Group building - ideas which strengthen farmers' relationships with each other and help build a stronger agricultural platform to launch from.
- Local initiatives – proactive 'soft' ideas that strengthen farmers' relationships with the non-farming community by widening their network of friends.

I am confident that these ideas will help bridge the divide between rural and urban people and are worth pursuing. It makes good sense to use the opportunities I have at Federated Farmers to begin to advocate for them. It feels as if exciting times are ahead.

CAMPAIGNS

Campaigns are the big ideas that mobilise and snowball large numbers of people into mass action. I am familiar with organising 'protest' campaigns which grow organically in deviant response to a particular situation but my challenge here is to build a national campaign from a position of authenticity and in the absence of any immediate conflict to rise up against.

I know from my stories in part two that I need to find the true and genuine way that farmers want to relate to non-farmers, and then to come up with a campaign action that can bring the two groups together (as opposed to alienating non-farmers from us).

FARMERS FEED FAMILIES

This idea stems from the Ontario farmer's public relations campaign. Their campaign looks for opportunities to promote agriculture and farmer contributions to communities; and in the absence of opportunity to make one.

I am attracted to the idea of a campaign that actively goes out to create opportunities which encourage farming (and farmers) to be shining stars by very deliberately turning the spotlight on ourselves. I believe that farmers would find it a relief to be proactive and work in ways which celebrate farming, rather than to remain reactive to other peoples' campaigns.

While in Ontario I saw that if farmers build their own stage they can write their own script. With this in mind, Federated Farmers has agreed to make their 2009 agricultural field day theme 'farmers feed families' and to, wherever possible, draw a connection between what farmers do on their land and the food that people have on their plate. The four field days (Northland, Central Districts, South Island and Mystery Creek) will create an opportunity for farmers to shine.

More opportunities in the future are needed.

FEDERATED FARMS OF NEW ZEALAND FARM DAY

The UK Open Farm Sunday 2008 saw over 450 farms open their gates to the public and more than 150,000 people take the opportunity to learn more about farming .

The UK Open Farm Sunday works because it makes farms more accessible and gives the farmer a stage upon which to tell their story . It creates an opportunity for farmers to build relationships with non-farmers in a forum which is determined and managed by the farmers . This in turn helps remove some of the mystery from farming practices .

Open Farm Sunday events are managed by LEAF, Linking Farming and the Environment, and use the National Farmers Union, NFU, and their network of local branches to create publicity and help out at the open farms. Both the farmers who open their gates and those that lend a hand on the day appear to be NFU members.

It makes sense to mirror the LEAF Open Farm Sunday formula in New Zealand using the Federated Farmers network of branches, provinces and national council. We should observe what they are doing in the UK and learn from them.

LEAF is an independent membership body. The NFU are one of many organisations and commercial companies who sponsor Open Farm Sunday. Despite this strong connection with the NFU, there seems to be no visible link being made between the farmers' political organisation and the individual farmer who is hosting an open farm event. Most non-farmers visiting the farm would leave not knowing what the NFU did and why; or even that their host farmer was a NFU member.

This misses an opportunity to present a softer side of the NFU to the non-farming community . It also means that the political issues farmers are facing in their industry may not get discussed at the open farm. This could have the unanticipated consequence of fuelling the mystery and suspicion non-farmers feel about the NFU .

If non-farmers leave a farm having made no connection with the NFU this does not help and perhaps even hinders the chances that the NFU has to build rapport and trust with non-farmers; yet these are the two critical things that the NFU needs when it wants to try and change non-farmers' attitudes towards agriculture .

The UK Open Farm Sunday was the most successful agricultural public relations campaign that I saw while I was overseas. Almost every UK farmer that I met spontaneously spoke about it to me yet none of this positive feedback appears to spill over to the NFU .

I left the UK with the feeling that the more positive farmers spoke of the LEAF Open Farm Sunday initiative, and similar soft campaigns such as 'adopt a farmer and grow a potato' , the more negativity they projected their frustrations onto the NFU. As a result I think that the NFU is in real danger of becoming isolated . I raised this observation with several UK farmers but they expressed a strong unwillingness to see Open Farm Sunday become political; they felt that it would detract from the message of the day.

I am not so sure – with strategic communications there should be room for both politics and fun at open farm events. In finding the authentic way that farmers want to reach out to non-farmers, habitual and familiar ways of conveying a political message may need to change. This includes how the NFU works with its members and the public generally to convey their political aspirations .

Back home in New Zealand, I had this at the forefront of my mind when Federated Farmers Wairarapa provincial president, Anders Crofoot, and I worked on a remit for the Federation's National Council for an open FARM DAY across New Zealand on the 1 March 2009. We were both clear that this day needed to be a stage for farming and Federated Farmers as 'the political voice of farmers'. Both need to shine.

Federated Farmers FARM DAY is modelled on the UK Open Farm Sunday. In its inaugural year at least one farm in every Federated Farmers province will open its gate to the public. Twenty four farms across the country will host guided farm walks and interactive activities for children between 10am and 3pm. Under the theme 'Discover the countryside' the two take home messages on the day will be:

- New Zealand farmers grow healthy, safe food that you can rely on.
- New Zealand farmers care about the environment.

We are committed to using this event to extend a welcoming 'Federated Farmers' hand to the public of New

Zealand. How many non-farmers will take up this opportunity to come onto a farm is unknown but those that do will go home knowing more about farming and Federated Farmers as the voice of farmers.

GROUP BUILDING

Group building ideas offer ways to strengthen the relationships between farmers and by doing so encourage in each farmer a stronger sense of fellowship, unity and a commitment to the agricultural team.

HAVING FUN, ENCOURAGING FELLOWSHIP

As part of the social/education programme at Pax Lodge, a World Guiding Centre in the heart of London, each year two two-day programmes are run for older Guides. These programmes aim to bring together women from around the UK and the world and reconfirm their commitment to the Guiding movement irrespective of whether they continue to be active as Guide Leaders.

When I saw this programme being advertised, and after having a chance to talk to some of the women running the course, I immediately felt that a similar investment into the companionship and fellowship within the farming community was needed. In my experience a lot of resource is invested into building up future agricultural leaders yet the majority of the farming community is invisible (unless they have a problem or are active in provincial work).

I am not aware of any farmer organisation overseas which runs programmes for its non-active members for the purpose of building fellowship; yet, it makes sense to provide opportunities to strengthen and build relationships across the agricultural community as a whole, rather than limit ourselves to those who aspire to go on and become leaders in governance.

I propose two actions, one local and one global.

At a local level, Federated Farmers could offer training/development opportunities to its members who do not want to become leaders but who enjoy the comradeship and friendship of being with other farmers. This would show respect and appreciation of members' allegiance to the Federation and confirm the commitment that the organisation has made to work for all members.

As a trial run in November 2008 I supported Chris Sundstrum, North Canterbury provincial president, to organise a seven day field trip to the Chatham Islands. This seemed like an opportunity for farmers to have some fun together, learn about the issues of farming on a remote island and for both sides (Islanders and Mainlanders) to share some of their farming skills and stories. The trip had room for 20 farmers and places have filled quickly (with a waiting list). This is evidence that there is interest in participating in events beyond traditional leadership courses.

On an international level, I have begun to think that there is a need to find a place for farmers of the world to come together under the umbrella of 'colleagues not competitors', share conversations and have fun. While on my Nuffield tour, I twice (albeit briefly) visited London. Both times I fell into an introspective period which I only pulled out of once I left the city. For some reason London didn't work for me – and then I went a third time with Rev. Graham Jones from the Arthur Rank Centre and things changed.

We were invited out for coffee at the Liberal Club with Stuart Burgess, the Commissioner for Rural Communities, and then I took Graham to the Farmers' Club and the New Zealand embassy invited the three of us to lunch. London became personal. I began to think about how many farmers take a world trip which includes London and if they would be interested in meeting up with other farmers for a 'Sunday lunch on a Monday' at the Farmers' Club in London. They could talk politics and farming and would be making global connections in ways that I enjoyed as a Nuffield scholar and which I am beginning to see are important if we are to change our own, and others' perceptions.

Now, I'm talking to people about this idea and simultaneously I realise that the role that I saw for myself when I was on the psychotherapy training workshop in upstate New York as a conduit is imaginable .

My Nuffield travels have extended my horizon and I imagine that from now on I will always think bigger.

PAL – PARTNERING AGRICULTURAL LEADERS

This is a two year leadership programme that runs in the United States of America for 12 people who are selected on a competitive basis. At any one time there are 24 people on the programme; 12 in year one and 12 in year two. The programme focuses on upskilling and mentoring agricultural leaders. These people go on to become the leaders in United States agriculture and the United States Farm Bureau. Linda Johnson, Director of policy implementation

programmes at the Farm Bureau says, “That the vitality of the current Farm Bureau national board can be put down in large part to the success of the PAL leadership programme”.

I first heard about this programme from one of the PAL course participants. She was enthusiastic, well informed and active in Oklahoma State farming politics. I then visited with the Farm Bureau in Washington DC and learnt more. I went to Austria and heard about a new degree at the University of Vienna which taught lobbying skills and students were given a practicum with activist groups.

Farmers like others around the world want to learn how to be more persuasive.

In Britain the Institute of Agricultural Management runs a bi-annual leadership course. I discussed this course with Heather Gorrige, who participated in 2008 . Eighteen top people from the agricultural industry, not limited to farmers, are invited to take part. The course involves three weeks of intensive study.

I propose that we run a similar, coordinated and graduated leadership mentoring programme in New Zealand for emerging agricultural leaders using ideas from existing programmes overseas. The course programme could include practical and mentored sessions in media, strategy and policy development such as:

- An individually designed training programme aligned to the person’s interests with ongoing support (supervision).
- One-on-one mentoring opportunity with a past agricultural leader.
- In the first half of the year a supervised and coached provincial policy experience.
- In the second half of the year a supervised and coached national policy experience (ie. select committee appearance).
- A written project with coaching.

This course would provide fertile ground for producing upcoming national leaders for the New Zealand agricultural sector.

Federated Farmers of New Zealand has proposed a new ‘Farmers’ University’. A PAL styled programme would sit well with what I understand this programme is intended to achieve.

LOCAL INITIATIVES

These are proactive ‘soft’ ideas that strengthen farmers’ relationships to the non-farming community by building a wider network of friends at a local community level.

ADOPT A FARMER

The aim of this UK campaign, which is part of the FACE (Farming and Countryside Education) is for every primary school in the UK to have ‘adopted a farmer’ by June 2008 . Farmers offering themselves up for adoption agree to visit a classroom, host a school visit and respond to children’s email questions. In return the school agrees to teach the children about agriculture and give their students a cooking and growing experience .

The idea is compelling and feels manageable if it gained momentum slowly. In the UK farmers have been willing to put themselves forward and even compete against each other for adoption; the children are invited to choose from the willing farmers, who they want to adopt.

It would be necessary to broker the adoption arrangements and provide some basic ground rules for both sides (and support to the farmers when they stand in front of the classroom) but the actual process of engagement could be left to individual parties to work through. This would be a concrete way to build rapport and lasting relationships between farmers and non-farmers.

I wonder how easy this would be to do – and whether it is possible within my current job description to launch an adoption agency.

CELEBRATING LOCAL FOOD PRODUCERS

Every year in the UK for a week and in Maryland USA for a month there is a celebration of locally produced food. The aim is to encourage people to be more conscious about what they eat and what their local farmers are producing.

In the UK the ‘A great start farmhouse breakfast’ sees the farmer cooking and hosting the event and non-farmers paying to eat . The money raised goes to charity. In both the USA and the UK I was told that the ‘eat local’ campaigns

encourage people to buy only locally grown food and includes ideas on how retailers and farm shops can participate by displaying locally grown products and restaurants celebrate local produce on their menus.

In France I visited a large market garden on the edge of a city where the customer was encouraged to become the farmer and pick and dig up their own food. I saw families, elderly and young people walking around the fields with wheelbarrows and spades. The owner told me that his city neighbours went from complaining about his business to having a personal interest in what he was growing and how .

I talked to UK farmers who had hosted breakfasts, French shoppers who were harvesting their own food and Maryland growers who relied on the 'buy local campaign' to stay financial. All were enthusiastic.

Both in the UK and the USA local food campaigns attract quite a bit of press coverage so the issue of 'buying local' has wider exposure than with just those participating. In France the market garden was part of a co-operative of 24 similar business scattered across the country, next to large populations.

I am still unsure how to promote this idea in New Zealand but there are clearly benefits if the farming industry could work collaboratively with the food service industry to recognise local produce. Regional branding initiatives, such as the North Canterbury Waipara wine festival, already celebrate local food. The challenge is to tie into these events the agricultural element by encouraging people to talk about how they produced the food and what they did to the land to achieve this.

Julia Evan's badge; Ask me I'm a farmer, is an easy way to begin. The badge works by reminding people that it was farmers who grew the food they are lining up to taste and invites them to ask questions about it.

PART FOUR: CONCLUSION

Reflecting back on my report I know that none of my ideas read alone is particularly revolutionary yet used as a strategic package I am convinced that it contains the right mix of actions to change attitudes.

A change in perceptions will only come when farmers working as a team can reach out towards non-farmers and begin to talk with people in an open and honest way.

The agricultural industry needs to work collaboratively in New Zealand and globally. We need to find ways to better share both our stories and our responses. We all need to look beyond the loud voices on the fringe and form relationships with the silent majority who buy and consume our products.

A good start would be for all of us to stop spreading the self-perpetuating myth that non-farmers don't like farmers. It is a too simplistic attempt at explaining the differences and misunderstandings between our different rural-urban communities of interest.

Federated Farmers' FARM DAY on Sunday, 1 March, is a great way for New Zealand farmers to begin to form new relationships with non-farmers.

The challenge now will be to ensure that farmers don't undervalue the power of personal story and are willing to take up invitations to stand on their stage and talk about their farming practices. Sometimes, these seemingly easy responses can be the most difficult to action.

My overseas study experience has strengthened my love of story as a way to mobilise and empower communities to action. Story is personal and its intimacy makes it very powerful.

My Nuffield year has given me the opportunity to meet many wonderful people, only a few of them have been named in this report. To all of them I send my heartfelt thanks and appreciation for their time, ideas and inspiration.

Thank you.

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APPENDIX 1



Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller's painting, Exhausted Strength, 1854