



**A Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust  
Report**

*Award sponsored by*

**Central Region Farmers Trust**



**GREAT farmers – Growing Really  
Exceptional And Talented farmers:  
training and development in agriculture**

**Christopher Padfield**

**July 2016**

**NUFFIELD UK**

## **NUFFIELD FARMING SCHOLARSHIPS TRUST (UK)**

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# A Nuffield (UK) Farming Scholarships Trust Report



Date of report: July 2016

*“Leading positive change in agriculture.  
Inspiring passion and potential in people.”*

|                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| Title                    | <b>GREAT farmers – Growing Really Exceptional And Talented farmers: training and development in agriculture</b>  |
| Scholar                  | Christopher Padfield   |
| Sponsor                  | Central Region Farmers Trust   |
| Objectives of Study Tour | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To discover how farmers and farm staff look to develop themselves once they have left formal education</li><li>• To understand the value placed on the training of farm staff</li><li>• To compare different training models seen during travels</li><li>• To identify learning frameworks that would be appropriate for career development of farm staff in the UK.</li></ul> |
| Countries Visited        | France, Germany, Holland, USA, Canada, Ireland   |
| Messages                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Good businesses have a clear vision and inspire their staff</li><li>• Farmers need to see labour as an investment, not a cost</li><li>• To inspire young people to enter the agricultural industry, it needs to present itself as a professional, respected career with structured training and CPD</li></ul>  |

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## **DISCLAIMER**

The opinions expressed in this report are my own views, based on my Nuffield study tour and my own experiences, and do not necessarily represent those of the Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust, or of my sponsor, or of any other body mentioned in this study.

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## Introduction

### 1.1. Inspiration for my study

*'Training is a waste of time',*

*'I'm only doing the course because my boss told me to',*

*'Can't you give us a ticket',*

*'College students aren't properly taught and a waste of time on machinery',*

*'Farming is common sense, you can't teach that':*

are just some of the more printable quotes I hear regularly as part of my job running a small land based training company. Indeed after 18 years involved in agricultural education in some form or another it struck me that I needed an opportunity to reconnect with the idea that learning and training are positive for farm businesses and that there must be some inspirational examples or ideas out there on how on-the-job training in agriculture is seen as an asset to the business and the people who are employed in it.

This is where the Nuffield Farming Scholarship offered me an opportunity to consider the topic in detail.

### 1.2. My background

After completing a degree in Agricultural and Environmental Science in 1995 I spent 16 months working as a graduate apprentice for a charity, Tear Fund, on agricultural projects in Ghana and Guinea Bissau. I learnt more than I contributed. It opened my eyes to the way that culture contributes both positively and negatively to our daily lives. I was fascinated by the way that, as an outsider, I could see fairly simple solutions to their agricultural problems. However due to a combination of factors - local culture, fear of change, lack of access to resources and capital, lack of government investment and support, these solutions were not often adopted. Turning that around I can ask the question: *'What would an outsider make of my own farm, especially of the farming culture and of British agriculture in general?'* This question was in my mind as I undertook my Nuffield Farming study.



Figure 1: The author, Chris Padfield



On my return from college in 1997, our family farm was well resourced in terms of existing labour so I took the opportunity to work at the local agricultural college. I ran the National Vocational Qualifications Levels 1-3 in Livestock and Crop Production. The students would spend one day a week in college and four days on a placement farm. One of my responsibilities was visiting each of the students: to check the Health and Safety aspects of the placement, see what skills the students could be assessed on, and which skills were lacking and needed to be developed further. I saw on the one hand how keen young people were to learn and work hard and how farmers took pride in their farms and systems and wanted to pass the knowledge on. On the other hand I saw how there were some negative aspects, typically anything to do with changing attitudes or actions towards Health and Safety, and any training that was going to cost the farmer money.

In 2001 I set up a small training company, concentrating on skills-based training. I was also qualified as an Internal Verifier and External Verifier for NVQs, and acted as Lead External Verifier for an awarding body for NVQs in plant operations on construction sites.

While reflecting on this I came up with a simple view of the process of training and continuous professional development (CPD) for farm workers in the UK. I shall call it simply – ‘the carrot and the stick’. Almost all the agricultural training that I have been involved in has been at the ‘stick’ end of the scale i.e. courses that are a mandatory requirement, required as best practice or because of an assurance scheme compliance point. Whilst I have engaged with farm workers on these courses I have been constantly amazed at the interest and enthusiasm they have for farming itself as an occupation. One candidate outlined his ideas for explaining to members of the public – as part of the Open Sunday campaign - the benefits to wildlife of the way arable rotations were set up. Another was passionate about the improvements that had resulted to cow welfare through changing the design of the cubicles.

*The ideas springing up from those actually doing the day to day work are a resource to be encouraged and nurtured*

The ideas springing up from those actually doing the day to day work are a resource to be encouraged and nurtured. This is the ‘carrot’ element - moving past the mandatory training that is seen as a building block, on to actually growing and nurturing farm staff.

**'CPD is not giving someone a ticket, it is growing them as a person'**

Today, in addition to the training work, my family and I run a 300ha arable farm, a direct drill contracting service, have a beef fattening joint venture, operate a 10,000-tonne grain storage business for local farmers, and also rent out 19 offices and workshops.

What skills and training do we need to consider to grow the business now and in the future?



## 2.0. Formulation of a study plan

My study plan had a very simple structure.

- Research farmers' attitudes to agricultural training in the UK, particularly on family farms
- Study similar sized farm businesses in neighbouring European countries in terms of what training was deemed necessary and useful
- Look at larger farm and non-farm businesses in North America and Canada and combine it with a visit to the International Farm Management Association Congress in Quebec
- Investigate CPD schemes in the UK
- Reflect on the study and look for a visit where I could draw some conclusions

### 2.1. Countries visited

| Date                        | Countries visited        |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| May 2015 - for 3 weeks      | France, Germany, Holland |
| July 2015 – for 3 weeks     | USA and Canada           |
| February 2016 – for 2 weeks | Ireland                  |



## 3.0. Agricultural training In the UK

### 3.1. Definition of agricultural training

When farmers think about education and training it is almost always external - e.g. going to college or attending a Safe Use of Pesticide course - rather than appreciating that many farmers themselves are quite naturally training in-house and 'on-the-job' (e.g. showing someone how to lamb).

**For the purposes of this report I will refer to 'the action of teaching a person a particular skill or type of behaviour' as agricultural training.**

Farmers who take on staff often have little experience of managing people and may have very high expectations of what is 'accepted practice' (expecting workers to match the long hours worked by the owner, expecting people to stay in a job for a long time and not look for personal development opportunities) which are not necessarily echoed by the employee. Getting the best from staff is a key challenge.

When we consider how a member of staff is generally taken on by a farming business compared with other industries:

- Interview / induction - there is often no formal induction or assessment of skill. It tends to happen naturally with the farmer making a judgement on skills and responsibilities.
- Job rotation - is often practised to provide cover for all the roles required on the farm
- Job instruction - is virtually never formalised - learning is generally by doing, so it is usually not seen as being training.
- Job role and division of responsibility - this is built up over time and rarely formalised although there is a legal requirement for formal job descriptions.

*Source: Gauert, conversation*

Therefore in this report when I consider the role of training on farms it will include the triple commitment of the farm owner, the manager, and staff. Whilst the skills required may be different, the principles will be the same and I will often be using the word 'farmer' to cover all three.

### 3.2. Farmers' attitudes to training

External courses are often only attended if statutory. Voluntary courses are not normally taken up due to perceived concerns about price or quality of the proposed training. Defining the value that will be derived either by the individual and/or the business is not straightforward. The cost of a course is obvious, the return less so. Prioritisation of training as an activity by the farmer, where it is not driven by law or farm assurance, is often low with attendance often cancelled at the last minute. This can be due to the low levels of labour on farms: so training has to be sacrificed in the face of a problem with a machine, weather changes, or a sudden lack of available time.

*The cost of a course is obvious, the return less so*



### 3.3. What training is taking place on UK farms?

- Compared with a national average of 65%, fewer employees in agriculture received training over the past 12 months (41%) than in any other sector. - *"Climbing the ladder: skills for sustainable recovery"*, UKCES July 2014
- Compared to a national average of 4.2 days per year, agricultural employers provide 2.5 days of training per employee per year. *UK Commission's Employer Skills Survey 2013, UKCES February 2014*
- Some 56% of high-performing farm businesses are in Continuous Professional Development Schemes, although 24% of all farm businesses claim not be aware of CPD training opportunities - *Farm Business Survey Management Practices Module. 2011/12 Defra*
- Low performing farms are less likely to rate the value of training - 53% of low performing farms identified no areas in which they would like to improve their knowledge or skills, compared to 41% of high-performing farms. *Farm Business Survey Management Practices Module. 2011/12 Defra*
- The same survey shows an increase in people wanting help with business management: the figure stands at less than 50% of respondents wanting to engage in further business management development, with only 12% looking for people management training.

Despite a relatively low level of engagement with training and skills development within the agricultural sector, the Farm Business Survey shows clear benefits of higher skills qualifications, use of training and adoption of better business practices. See Figure 2 below - *Farm Business Survey Management Practices Module 2011/12 Defra*

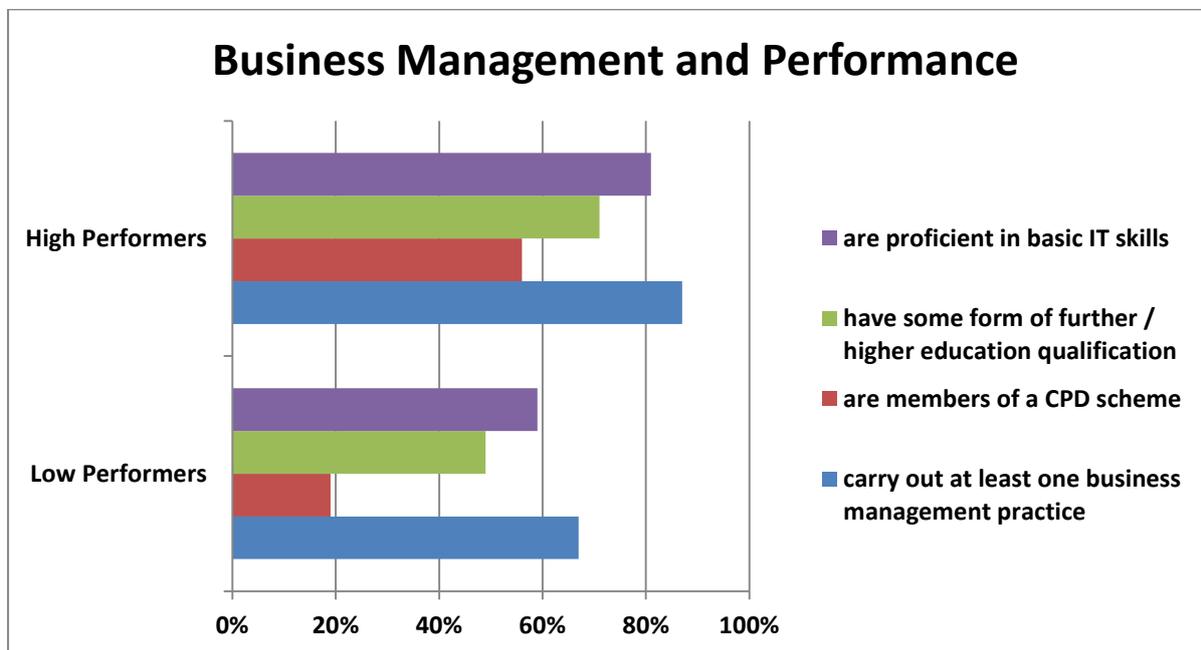


Figure 2: Farm Business Survey Management Practices Module 2011/12 Defra

**"Nothing is more critical to farming's success than ensuring that those who work in it are ambitious and skilled". - Food and Farming Review Report, Defra, July 2013**



It is important to acknowledge that not all farming sectors are the same and that larger agribusinesses will almost certainly have specific HR functions and training budgets. Work in the USA (*Personnel Management Research in Agribusiness, Vera Bitsch 2009*) points to a decreasing scale in terms of the importance of labour, starting with horticulture, dairy farming, poultry production, livestock farming and, finally, arable cropping and I suspect the same holds for UK agriculture. However in UK agriculture, 88% of farm businesses employ four or less people, (*LMI Factsheet England (2010-11) Lantra 2011*) most of whom do not have HR departments or formal training budgets or plans.

Indeed a review of personnel management (looking at US farms) points out 'learning management in agriculture is often limited to imitating the supervisor, and training in many cases consists of "sink or swim"' (*Personnel Management Research in Agribusiness, Vera Bitsch 2009*)

### 3.4. What does it mean for the average farmer?

By 'average farmer' I mean a small business employing around 4 to 10 people, with long term plans to hand the business on, and, typically, family owned and orientated.

**I believe farmers will have to recognise that the responsibility  
lies with themselves and those they employ**

Whilst those working in formal education will look to produce future farmers with the relevant skills, I believe farmers will have to recognise that the responsibility lies with themselves and those they employ. Workers might be in college for one to three years but in the workplace for the next forty.

However, the difficulty of organising and paying for training schemes in very small businesses should not be underestimated, both in terms of arranging for staff to be away from the business duties and paying for courses when income streams are suffering.

It also needs to be recognised there are two main schools of thought on training and development. Training can be seen as reducing safety problems, reducing the chance of poor work and improving efficiency. However:

- The first view is that only the minimum training should be offered in basic tasks as, with better training, employees may demand higher wages or leave after training.
- The second view is that managers believe that whatever they invest in training will pay off and will often train employees beyond their current job roles

*(Labour Risk Attributes in the Green Industry: Business Owners and Managers Perspectives,  
V. Bitsch and S. Harsh 2004)*



## 4.0. What individual business can do

### 4.1. The findings of my study

To state the obvious, everyone has gone through some form of training, and had a job either as an employee or as self employed. It meant that everyone I met or spoke to had a valid opinion and view, no matter what business they worked in. It also meant that my findings are not new, or unique, and to be blunt, very obvious to those working in HR departments and running successful businesses. Nevertheless, for me, it was a fantastic opportunity to put my head outside the farm gate and be inspired by the good practice I witnessed. It also meant going back to basics.

#### There so many benefits to looking outside the farm gate

In my study plan I had planned to compare and contrast small European farmers and larger North American counterparts. However I have put all the businesses together in the findings as the observations I made were shared. Putting aside differences in terms of education and government support (and it is hard to overstate how substantial these were) it seemed to me farmers need to concentrate on four widely recognised values. These values were shared by small and large businesses alike and were common no matter which country I visited. The findings surprised me as I had not actively considered them part of 'training' nor incorporated them into my business.

*The findings surprised me as I had not actively considered them part of 'training' nor incorporated them into my business*

These four main areas for farmers to consider are:

1. **Vision**
2. **Recruitment and Motivation**
3. **Soft skills**
4. **Leading change**

### 4.2. The vision thing

At the Nuffield France Contemporary Scholars Conference in Reims in February 2015 a lecture on leadership began with the inspirational Michael Ehmann, CEO of Natais, a company near Toulouse which is responsible for 40% of Europe's production of popcorn, sourcing 30,000 tonnes of the raw material from France, and 15,000 tonnes from South Africa. He pointed out leaders needed to be open-minded, have a vision, be predictable with people, be able to create a network, take decisions, and inspire people. He emphasised that the communication of the firm's vision is very important - he has four meetings a year to discuss this with his managers. He also conducts appraisals with targets for all his middle managers - a good investment but very time consuming.

**Farm management is about developing people to do the right things**



Developing a vision for a large company and being able to communicate it to all might be essential, but is it necessary on a small farm?

From my own point of view, growing up as the 4th generation on a family farm, the whole concept of a written down, easily communicable vision was very foreign and we didn't have one. If we didn't know what we were doing after 105 years what had we been doing all that time? However, I began to see the importance and explored the idea further. The fundamental importance of a clear vision for the business became reinforced during my study. Those who really knew what they wanted to achieve would identify the skills and abilities that were required within their business to meet that vision, recruit or upskill staff where gaps were identified, and be able to review progress against the stated goals.

### Case Study 1: Holland

Gerjan Snippe is a fellow 2015 Nuffield Farming Scholar who runs an entirely organic fresh vegetable producing farm in the polder area of Holland. I visited him in May 2015. Originally from a dairy background, he saw the opportunity to supply organic vegetables into a growing market both at home and abroad. Starting small and selling through a co-op was not proving satisfactory, so in 2005, in partnership with two other farms, he set up Bio Brass.

Each year he grows 200 ha of organic salads/brassicas in a rotation spread over 2000 ha of organic land in cooperation with four other farmers, and with a minimum break of 6 crops. His vision is very much consumer focused, building backwards from the consumer to the field, a concept he learnt from farmers in the UK. He is passionate about promoting 'balanced farming' - a sustainable model not dependent on outside suppliers (e.g. potash, nitrogen) with the label of "organic" meaning professional and good, rather than a cliché of woolly socks and sandals.

I visited his new "consumer experience centre" that they are developing to showcase their produce, their values and their demonstration area - essentially aiming to sell the crop rotation!

The point I took away with me to consider further was the degree to which the vision of the owners was so clearly integral to the nature and direction of the business and that staff could then, and did, buy into that concept. Motivation therefore was not necessarily driven by money or likelihood of promotion. Assistance from outside consultants had been sought to run staff appraisals and to ask difficult questions not always easy to raise in a closely knit workforce.

### **Good businesses have a clear vision, and that inspires their staff.**

The vision drives the recruitment policy and focuses staff training and appraisals.



### 4.3. Recruitment and motivation

One of the key concerns of farm managers I heard during my Nuffield Farming travels was the recruitment and retention of quality farm staff. Having the right people to work with the company vision is essential.

**Yet people management is a skill that can be learnt,  
not something you either have or don't have**

After being sent a copy of his monthly articles on developing farm staff (*LearningEdge Monthly*), I contacted Dr Robert Milligan. Not only did an invitation to visit Minneapolis in July 2015 follow, but also an itinerary of planned visits and the offer to pick me up from the airport. This was incredibly generous not least because the 3rd July was a national holiday (the 4th being on a Saturday). Bob's wife, Sharon Danes, also joined us for the farm tour.

Sharon is Professor in the Department of Family Science at the University of Minnesota. She has undertaken considerable research into family businesses ranging from "mom and pop" operations to large multinationals. Defining a family business is not easy but ultimately it is where there is human, social and financial capital invested by the family. She was adamant that farmers should not refer to themselves as family farms but as family businesses, not least for the mindset it engenders in the farmer, but also because non-farmers see family farms as a bit 'Old Macdonald.'

*She was adamant that farmers should not refer to themselves as family farms but as family businesses*

Bob's early career was based at Cornell University and initially based on financial work in agriculture but, for the last 30 years, has focused on people. With a background in agricultural extension he developed courses on managing for success - writing visions, recognising problems and solving them.

*people management is a skill that can be learnt not something you either have or don't have*

He also developed courses on conflict management. After leaving Cornell he now works in Minneapolis with Dairy Strategies and we had an interesting conversation on managing change in a business. He also reinforced the point that people management is a skill that can be learnt not something you either have or don't have.

Bob had arranged for us to visit two farms where he is involved in coaching and developing staff. The first was Saratoga Partnerships run by Tim and Sue Richter and Jackson Dohlman.

*See Case Study overleaf*



### Case study 2: USA. Be 'employer of choice'

Tim (see photo on next page) had attended a TEPAP course run by Texas A&M University and came back inspired to make changes to the family farm. These resulted in moving from rearing outdoor pigs to growing 9000 acres of crops (mainly maize and soya) and fattening 30,000 pigs in Iowa, plus farming 2500 acres of arable land in Missouri (400 miles away). The business had a real focus on the culture of the farm being truly goal driven: for example planting 9000 acres in 6½ days. Jackson has taken on the role of looking after the HR side of the business with the aim of being 'employer of choice' in the area.

Recruiting and retaining staff was a major problem in every country I visited and the aim of this business was to have potential employees knocking on the door *asking* to work for the company. When new staff were inducted 'on boarding' personality testing was undertaken. When team meetings were held to plan the planting campaigns, emphasis was put not only on the what, and how, but also on the 'why'. The business was motivated not only by what it could accomplish but also by having fun.

It was the concept of making the business a desirable place to work, people taking a lower wage but gaining more satisfaction from their work, of actively seeking to work for you, that grabbed my attention.

The phrases 'Employer of choice' or 'Preferred employer' were new ones to me but echoed some research I had seen which stated **'Employee referral and word of mouth seem more viable hiring strategies than advertisements and walk-in'** (*Labour Risk Attributes in the Green Industry: Business Owners and Managers Perspectives*, V. Bitsch and S. Harsh 2004)

*See Case Study 3: USA. Labour is an investment not a cost – 2 pages further on*



Figure 3: Tim Richter and Jackson Dohlman



### Case Study 3: USA. Labour is an investment not a cost

The second farm was the Gar-Lin dairy farms where we met Dana Allen-Tully who ran the farm, and her husband Jim who supported her and ran his own nutrition consultancy business in California. The dairy milks 1700 cows, milking three times a day all year round.

The farm covers 4500 acres of which approximately half is owned and half rented. They had developed a separate feed centre about a mile away from the dairy where all the silage and feed stocks were kept. This allowed both the dairy and the feed areas to be developed unconstrained by neighbouring buildings. Again, Bob has worked with the business to develop the team of around 45 full time staff. Dana was clear that she had consistently high expectations of her staff and spent time recruiting and training good people. Jim was encouraging farms to see labour as an investment not a cost. He didn't like businesses that treated employees as employees; noting that motivation was not so much a function of money and coercion, rather it was to create an environment where self motivation came through.



Figure 4: Gar-Lin Dairy

Seeing staff as an investment, not a cost, was a theme I had begun to explore at the start of my study and effectively could be considered a tagline for my work. It was here that my arable farming background kicked in when I looked at how I was willing to spend on machinery but not on training. I was inspired by a chance remark from a machinery dealer who pointed out that **often UK farmers would spend substantial six figure sums on new machinery, and then spend little or no time or money on training staff on how to use it correctly.** Indeed the dealer estimated less than 50% of



their flagship tractors were actually being operated correctly to their potential; in the other 50% the drivers were merely seat attendants. This theme was revisited in a visit to a machinery dealer in Canada .

#### **Case Study 4: Canada. The most expensive people are the cheapest**

In July 2015 Sid Patterson kindly agreed to talk to me about his farm equipment business - Hepson Equipment - run in partnership with Paul Hepworth in Manitoba, Canada. They sell and service a wide range of machines including Versatile tractors, Kubota, Claas foragers, JCB etc. It is a strong and growing business and it was useful to learn why. They aimed to create a good working atmosphere with hands on, approachable management. The aim of the business was to offer the highest levels of service.

When recruiting staff (there were 18 employees) the **attitude and work ethic was more important than the training the employee had received so far in his/her career**. Indeed the best ones were often those who had come on board at the start of their careers and had been trained in the 'Hepson' way of thinking. The pull of the oil money in Alberta has meant staff retention is a problem common across all the farms and businesses visited. In addition wages had risen fast, even up to \$30/hour, but that was around half what could be earned in the oil fields for very basic jobs. However Sidney did not have a problem with high wages - "the most expensive people are the cheapest."



Figure 5: Sid Patterson standing outside his business



Figure 6: Canadian style service vehicle

Interestingly the conversation then turned to one of their biggest problems which is training farmers. They estimated around 50% of farmers actually took time to read operators' manuals and learn from the mechanics/sales people. The rest would jump on and drive and then phone if it didn't work properly. Hepsom Equipment would like to have a dedicated trainer to assist farmers, though the cost has to be borne somewhere, and in addition, the distances to travel are vast - maybe 6 hours' drive to service a machine. The acceptance by some farmers that they don't know it all, echoes directly a conversation I had in the UK with a machinery distributor.

The right team member is key to recruitment and strengthening the business - attitude and work ethic can trump paper qualifications. Employees with the right skills are more expensive but may be of more value to a business than cheaper staff with fewer skills.

I do wonder if the way we approach training on machinery is the correct way in the UK. There is a definite need for training on safe operation and use of equipment (and is a legal requirement) but, in my experience, most practical people learn by doing. A day in the classroom will not necessarily be the best way of getting the most from a combine or a forage harvester. A 200-page manual can be off putting, so maybe manufacturers need to look at short video clips - which can be downloaded onto mobiles - on how to set up machines for specific operations. I think this is how the next generation learn in general, and another reason why flexibility and attitude are so important. Technology changes, so learning everything at college is no longer going to suffice. It is more important to know when and where you need to go to find relevant info and be able to work with change.

### **Motivation: the need for appraisals**

In a conversation with an agricultural researcher in Mannheim, Germany, in May 2015 I learnt about some of the latest research in this part of Germany. It concerned staff motivation on small family farms, 90% of which were run by the owners, and about 25% employed additional staff. In many small companies employees were asked to rank their happiness with the job with 1 equalling leave



and 10 equalling love. For many small farms it was found the scale only needed to be 1 to 3 - you either loved it and fitted, or didn't and left. How people 'fit' is very important.

Farmers also need to learn what motivates staff and emphasise the positives of farm work especially when recruiting people from a non-farm background. Whilst some jobs are boring there can be an intrinsic motivation (e.g. caring for livestock) with a relevance to the work and with a responsibility for the outcome, which will immediately provide feedback. Often workers could see the whole process and had high levels of satisfaction. Farmers should also be encouraged to carry out appraisals of their staff, not necessarily formally, to really understand what drives their work ethic.

Often money is not the main motivator: indeed it can be a demotivator. Identifying what demotivates people and ensuring that these hurdles can be removed is very important. I suspect that most appraisals of farm staff are best done on a regular, informal basis rather than a formal structured basis but I wanted to see the benefits of formal appraisals in larger companies.

### Case Study 5: Ireland

Maire McCarthy is Head of Auditing Services at SouthWestern, one of the top business-process-outsourcing companies in Ireland. She is also a 2015 Nuffield Farming Scholar. As part of my visit to SouthWestern she arranged for me to talk to Una Fitzgerald, a learning and development specialist who spent some time talking me through the training and development of staff at the company.

When recruiting people for customer service work, a simple 15:15:70 rule was useful: 15% skills, 15% experience, 70% integrity (attitude/mindset) and taking ownership. She explained how they had set up courses to develop a positive, can-do culture in the firm. This was a four stage process starting with a psychometric assessment with an external consultant, leading a business profile average. The second stage concentrated on coaching and training for 5 days, spread over a year, with emphasis on team building, conflict management, emotional intelligence etc. The third part was a detailed explanation of the business, how it works, the costs and secrets. The final stage was a set task to come up with ways to improve the business, the best ideas being pitched to management after peer review.

Una also was involved in 360 degree evaluations used for development purposes. Each participant would nominate a range of people to review them against key competencies. Gaps would be identified between how the participants rated themselves and how others experienced them.

The value of regular appraisals was driven home to me but also pointed me to the third big thing I thought was important and overlooked in most farmer training courses I have been involved in - soft skills.



#### 4.4. Soft Skills

To quote Wikipedia: 'Soft skills is a term often associated with a person's ["EQ" \(Emotional Intelligence Quotient\)](#), the cluster of personality traits, social graces, communication, language, personal habits, interpersonal skills, managing people, leadership, etc. that characterise relationships with other people. Soft skills contrast to hard skills, which are generally easily quantifiable and measurable (e.g. software knowledge, basic plumbing skills).'

A person's soft skill EQ is an important part of their individual contribution to the success of an organisation. 'Screening or training for personal habits or traits such as dependability and conscientiousness can yield significant return on investment for an organisation. For this reason, soft skills are increasingly sought out by employers in addition to standard qualifications.'  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soft\\_skills](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soft_skills)

This is an area I have been really interested in for a long time. I noticed how a number of farm staff struggled when promoted. A local contactor had a great business when operating as a one-man-band but, after expansion and recruiting some staff, it fell apart. A neighbour was a great dairyman at a local dairy farm but, when promoted to herd manager, had real difficulty in overseeing other staff members and dealing with suppliers.

It was my impression that these changed roles required managing people and that, in the instances above, along with almost all famers I know, no formal training in managing teams, managing stress, managing conflict or how to communicate clearly, had been given or undertaken.

#### Developing human relationships and skills

I was delighted to have an opportunity to visit Elaine and Wes Froese in July 2015 at their farm in Boissevain, Manitoba. Elaine Froese is a professional speaker, writer and farm family coach who specialises in succession planning. Elaine helps family businesses talk about the tough issues and act on them. She has a very down-to-earth approach but a wealth of wisdom and knowledge to enable discussion of problems that affect most family farms - conflict, family succession planning, and personal development. A Virginia Tech study of 400 farms found that farm family businesses that could communicate were 21% more profitable.



Figure 7: Wes Froese and me in canola (rape) field



Elaine lives on a farm with her husband, Wes, who runs Boissevian Select Seeds which is a family-owned farm and seed cleaning operation started in 1971. He farms 5000 acres growing a wide range of crops including rye, wheat, OSR, soya, oats, flax and hemp. It was interesting to talk while on the way round the farm and, when I asked Wes what were the two biggest threats to farms in Manitoba, he replied: "divorce and poor management". This answer stopped me in my tracks (I was expecting price volatility and weather) as it seemed to hit the nail on the head but be little talked about on farms, or taught at college.

**It got me thinking about how much time farmers in the UK spend on choosing the right tractor, the cropping rotation, and the design of feed rations - compared to developing human relationships and skills, either in the home or workplace.**

Elaine also got me thinking about the statements below:

- Workaholics are lazy in relationships (it is an avoidance strategy)
- It is essential to clarify your expectations of others - you get the behaviour you accept

The threats or risks farm businesses are exposed to are summarised in five headings in a report (*Labour Risk Attributes in the Green Industry: Business Owners and Managers Perspectives, V. Bitsch and S. Harsh 2004*):

1. production risk,
2. price and market risk,
3. financial risk, human resource risk,
4. institutional, legal and environmental risk.

They point out that whilst the financial risk must be underlined, human resource risk and institutional risk are more important to farm survival than production and marketing risk.

### **Negotiating skills**

The importance of good communication skills was brought home to me in a very different way during a visit to Nordhausen, Germany, in May 2015. The rise and fall of the Iron Curtain has interested me ever since the collapse of the Eastern bloc in 1989 which coincided with studying the post-war era at school. Therefore I thought it would be interesting to visit farms in the former East and West Germany.

*See Case Study 6 on next page*



## Case Study 6: Germany

In 1990 Markus Meyers and his family decided to take the opportunity to rent land in East Germany, starting with 70ha and now farming 500ha. Markus has over 80 landlords. Each piece of land in East Germany legally has to be divided between all offspring so land ownership is fractured. However, if enough landlords agree, then large fields can be built up, and his fields ranged from 0.5ha to 50ha. He was also able to rationalise fields by swapping rented areas with another farmer. Markus spends around 3 weeks a year talking and negotiating with his landlords - people skills are clearly vital.

Markus focused on keeping himself up to date with agricultural practices by using paid advisers (e.g. an extensive benchmarking exercise with comparisons to 150 other farms in East Germany, Hungary and Austria), going on organised farmer trips to other regions or countries, using the internet, and by carrying out crop trials. Farm staff did not really attend training courses and there was little in the way of statutory requirements for training. Markus acknowledged that increasing farm wages were not a very good motivator and found that spending time communicating clearly with staff, both professionally and socially, was more important. However, the key to his business was negotiating with landlords and collaboration with neighbours.

The photo below is not very clear but it will serve to show how complicated land ownership is.

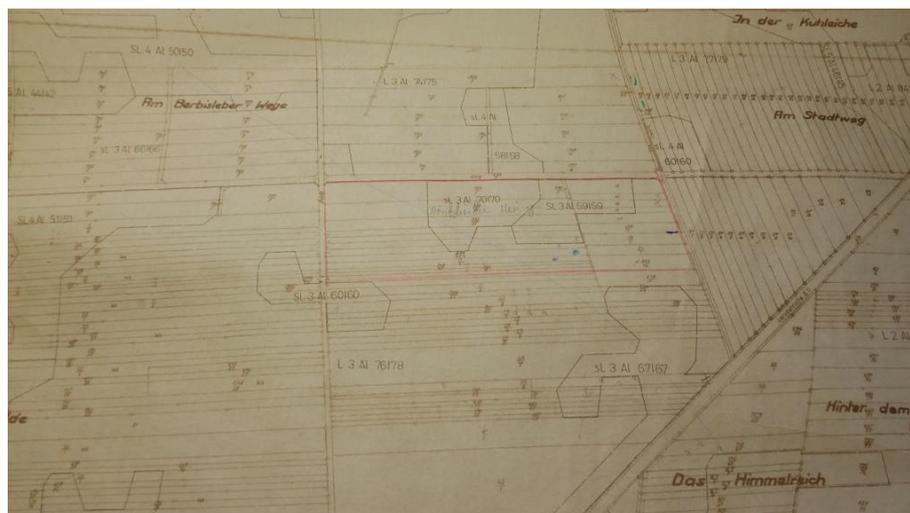


Figure 8: Field boundary margins and ownership

The conclusion I drew from these visits, both in Canada and East Germany, was that soft skills will be ever more important as farms get fewer and larger. The ability to work with others, to negotiate, to communicate clearly, to resolve conflict, are vital skills which need to be learnt where they are not a natural ability.



#### 4.5. Leading and installing change

For the fourth of the areas I looked at - leading and installing change to position businesses for the future - a really inspiring visit was meeting Randy Lewis in July 2015.

***“It's not about me, it's about us. Cling to your principles.  
They will encourage you to do the right thing”***

I heard Randy Lewis being interviewed on a radio programme in the UK and found it really inspiring so I made contact with him and was delighted that he agreed to meet me at his home in Gary (on the lake outside Chicago). Randy was senior Vice President of Walgreens, overseeing the supply chain development as the company grew from 1500 to 8000 stores, and is also currently on the board of Wendy's.



Figure 9: Randy Lewis

However it was for his work - encouraging those with disabilities to be actively recruited into the distribution centres run by Walgreens and be accepted on the same pay, conditions and work standards as everyone else - that he is most widely recognised. Indeed, at the two most modern distribution centres at Hartford and Anderson, between 40 and 50% of the workforce is made up of people with disabilities and the company has a target of 10% of new hires in the entry level positions across the entire company, including all the stores, being given to disabled persons. Coming from a small family farm myself, I appreciate there is a world of difference in the experience of growing a few crops and changing the work culture

of a Fortune 50 company. However there are some essential principles that can be used in any company. Obviously the focus of the company has to be to make a profit with a responsibility to the shareholders: but it should be more than this - and remember that the work impacts employees and the community at large.

#### **If no one has done it before then it is an opportunity, not a stop sign**

People are motivated by money, mission and meaning in that order. Mission gives the sense of achievement but it doesn't tell us why we do it (climbing a mountain is the mission, but why did we climb?). Farming is possibly an easy sell - growing food to feed others is a clear imperative. However, can we go further and aim to do good, enhance the environment, engage more with the community, and develop young people? Perhaps I was impressed with the relentless desire to make the work output better - *'when people say best practice, think best practice so far'* - but also a more inclusive and better workplace at the same time. When I asked how to drive change in a business he replied that it has to be **driven from the top and if the top needs to be changed then do so**. When I was asked what for me makes a good boss, I flannelled a bit and muttered something about being able to buy into his vision. Randy replied it was all about trust: trust in your staff and that they will trust you even when things are tough.

*When I asked how to drive change in a business he replied that it has to be **driven from the top and if the top needs to be changed then do so***



When it comes to making the workplace a better place, surely an inclusive model where all are treated equally should be aimed for and, as for the numbers, the centres with high levels of disabled within the workforce have 50% better retention of staff and 50% fewer sick days than those that do not. That has to stack up.

When farmers and packhouses need staff, are we in danger of overlooking certain sections of the workforce as we direct our gaze to Eastern Europe and beyond?

Our businesses might be successful but are they doing good? Are they making the employees, workplace and community a better place and adding value to people's lives?

*the centres with high levels of disabled within the workforce have 50% better retention of staff and 50% fewer sick days than those that do not*

#### 4.6. Making change stick

If we are looking to change the direction of the business, or influence the drive and motivation of the workforce, how do we make sure that the change sticks?

Dr Robert Kent is a specialist in the structure and management of small and medium-sized organisations, and former Director of the Canadian Association of Farm Advisors. We met over lunch in Winnipeg in July 2015. Robert believes in keeping management simple and to question new management fads to see what they actually bring to the table. He counsels three essential requirements for organisational success. The organisation can be a farm, a club or a large business.

- **Firstly** does the organisation ensure that everyone knows what to do, why they are doing it and how to do it? That is the core responsibility of management.
- **Secondly** does the organisation ensure that everyone receives support to make them successful in their respective jobs? A manager needs to make sure equipment, material and skills are provided but also endeavour to strengthen employees' expectation of success, self-confidence and self esteem. Non-acceptable behaviour must be corrected.
- **Thirdly** the organisation ensures that everyone follows through and is accountable for meeting the performance expectations and obligations.

I quote here from an article written by Robert Kent called 'The Farm Manager':

*'A case can be made that, for the vast majority of farmers, skills and processes for managing farm employees are a non-issue. With only one or two long-term farm hands and some family help, the work gets done pretty much the way it should. You know what needs to be done and you ensure it's done right. **But what you have built for yourself is a job and not a business. The farm has successfully flown by the seat of your pants, not theirs. If you want your farm to be a business then you have to start to make it less dependent on you and begin to turn it into a farm system that you can manage. Your estate will inherit a successful farm business system that retains its value even without you!***



A common research finding is that if you put a supervisor and an employee together there is seldom total agreement on exactly what the employee's job role is within the organisation. Robert emphasised the need to **define someone's role - more than a job description - namely the expectations, values, relationships and activities which are associated with a position.**

A farmer plays many roles including general manager, owner, spouse, parent and neighbour. Key components of the role include **expectations** - expectations that employees, suppliers, bank manager have of you (e.g. direction and decisiveness): and the expectations you have of employees (e.g. respect, a full day's work). Being aware of these expectations clarifies your role.

Secondly, **values** - what should you place high value on? The answer impacts your decisions and behaviour (e.g. priority on maintaining morale? productivity? profitability?)

Thirdly, **relationships** - between peers, suppliers and subordinates. Relationships will be different with all three. The change is sometimes difficult for a newly promoted person to judge e.g. gauging social distance with colleagues.

Lastly **activities** - what you do in the job.

#### 4.6. A personal note

##### **What was fascinating was that not much of our own farm mission statement and values were actually incorporated into the job roles on our farm**

I have now developed job descriptions, roles and expectations within our family farm though working this through with parents and spouse was initially scary. Afterwards, however, it proved to be quite liberating as it enabled boundaries and responsibilities to be more clearly defined.

However, what was fascinating was that it was too easy to concentrate on the day to day responsibilities (operational work) rather than look to actively incorporate the farm mission statement and values at a strategic level. How much of what we do is actually productive and relevant to achieving our vision?



## 5.0. What does the future look like for the agricultural industry?

### 5.1. The next step?

I have looked at the four values of vision, recruitment and motivation, soft skills and leading change, and pointed out that everything comes back to aligning the business, staff and training to a clearly defined vision.

I will now consider, in a very general way, what future skills might be required in the agricultural sector and then look at a practical assessment of training courses in the UK.

### 5.2. Which skills will be required in the future?

According to the UKCES Sector Skills Assessment, knowledge and appreciation of the sciences and application of ICT are key future skills needed to deliver sustainable intensification and precision farming, particularly in the face of concerns over food security and a growing global population. *UKCES Sector Skills Assessment for Agriculture, Forest and Fishing 2012.*

The 20th International Farm Management Congress was held from the 12-17 July, 2015, in Quebec and I attended as part of my Nuffield Farming travel. The stated vision of the organisation is: *'The success of any farm enterprise, regardless of size, geography or commodity, is directly related to the farm business management skills and practices of the farm manager'*.

For me, one of the most interesting presentations was by Sam Sebastian, Managing Director of Google Canada, on *'How Google works: lessons and opportunities for agriculture'*.

#### **'Every company will be a software company'**

He pointed out that over 2.5 billion people have frictionless access to the internet and this will increase to 5 billion very soon. He stated: *'Every company will be a software company'* and challenged farmers to understand what changes they needed to make in their business culture to meet this trend. Another key point was that farm management is about developing people to do the right things. He pointed to Google's 6 key tenets:

- Big clear vision
- Transparency - weekly meetings with company founders for all staff
- Ideas come from everywhere - flat organisational structure and avoiding HIPPOs (highest paid person's opinion)
- Data beats opinion - base decisions on fact
- People are your number one asset
- Moonshot thinking - think big

Separately a report available online - *Farming Futures "Future Skills: Potential farming roles and skills by 2030"* <http://www.farmingfutures.org.uk/future-skills/6-jobs> - synthesised expected future trends in agriculture and generated six roles expected to be prominent in 2030:



- Geoengineer - alongside food production the farmer specialises in carbon sequestration.
- Web 3.0 Farm Host - information management of food provenance and animal welfare linking to the consumer
- Insect Farmer- used for pest control and for protein production
- Energy Farmers - specialise in renewable energy production and management of smart grids
- Animal Therapist - animal psychology and behaviour expertise
- Pharmer
- drug products may be able to be delivered directly via animal and plant products

These roles largely focus on land and environmental management, business and IT skills, and scientific knowledge.

Another approach to potential ideas for the future of farming was to look at companies getting involved in food production for the first time: i.e. from a non-farming perspective.

#### Case Study 7: USA. Ideas from Boston

On a visit to the city of Boston, MA, in the USA in June 2015, I visited a company allowing customers to grow salad crops and herbs, year-round, right next to the consumer. 'Freight Farmers' have come up with the solution of using insulated 40ft shipping containers fitted out with hydroponics and LED lighting and a computer system that fully automates all the growing conditions, including uploading the data to an app on your phone.

The company was set up in 2010 by Jon Friedman and Brad McNamara using Kickstarter as an initial funding source. The system offers to restaurants, community groups or entrepreneurs the ability to grow food in their own back yard even if it is covered in tarmac. The modular design makes the operation easy to scale should demand grow. What interested me was that the agricultural part - growing of the produce - was not a required skill, but attention to detail (mainly by monitoring computer data) and skilled marketing of the produce was.

Whether 'city' or 'vertical' farms will be anything but a niche I don't know but it is the science and IT skills behind them that are interesting. The skill of growing crops in a controlled environment lies in setting up the IT systems and machinery. Communication with the consumer is the vital skill of the farmer.

*See photo of Patrick Joyce from Freight Farmers on next page*



Figure 10: Patrick Joyce from Freight Farmers

### 5.3 Factory farming

The Economist, in a technology quarterly *The future of agriculture (June 2016)* states - in what seems to be a rather depressing summary to a small family farmer:

*'the technological rationale for precision agriculture suggests farms should continue to consolidate...these large holdings will come more and more to resemble manufacturing operations, wringing every last ounce of efficiency out of land and machinery. Such large - scale farms will probably continue to be served by corporations that provide seed, stock, machines and management plans. But, in the case of management plans, there is an opening for new firms with better ideas to nip in and steal at least part of the market...other openings such as inland fish farming and urban vertical farming are waves of the future in the service of urbanites. In these businesses, the idea of farm as factory is brought to its logical conclusion.'*

So what are the minimum skills required for future farmers?

A resilient individual who:

- can filter information
- has great technical ability
- has ability to access and manage human resources
- has a financial skills set
- has the desire to focus on a winning strategy.



## 6.0. How can the industry help itself

For the next part of my study I turned to the UK to look at a selection of training and CPD schemes currently available to farmers.

### 6.1. The training landscape

Owners and managers will constantly need to look to the future to plot a course to make sure the business is adapting to new pressures and demands. These pressures will include greater technical ability and human resource management. This will need ongoing training.

### 6.2. How do you deliver training and skills development, relevant to industry standards and accurately recorded?

It is my view that there is plenty of training provision and schemes available to farmers. However there is not necessarily a simple, easily followed framework or path.

Whilst large businesses can set up in-house training and CPD schemes, 88% of farms in the UK employ 4 people or less and, therefore, using an industry-recognised CPD scheme is likely to be more cost effective and portable for the employees.

There are a number of agricultural CPD schemes catering for different sectors. I did not carry out a comprehensive review: rather I thought it would be useful to compare three different schemes. **Firstly** a CPD scheme that aims to be entirely independent, non-statutory and with 100% cost recovery, **another** which, at its core, is mandatory and therefore has a secure funded stream, and then **briefly** look at a specific livestock-sector CPD scheme.

### 6.3. Independent and aiming to have full cost recovery

I was really interested in the ARTIS (Agri-Tech Register and Training) approach as it exists to supply a structured CPD route for arable/horticultural farmers who want to learn and develop skills to be the best they can voluntarily *without any link to a statutory requirement or voluntary code*.

*See Case Study on next page*

Encouraging an industry that it needs to spend money on training is difficult. However I think that if you find spending £200/day on training a problem you probably have the wrong focus, though a clear statement of cost/benefit of any CPD course would be useful. Without widespread support from the industry, building a sustainable future for non-mandatory training will be vital but an uphill struggle.



### Case Study 8: Independent CPD

Dr Juno Mckee took the time to explain more about ARTIS - Agri-tech Register and Training for Innovation and Skills - to me. To quote from the literature: *'ARTIS is an industry-led accredited training initiative, launched in 2014 and developed by growers, NIAB, LANTRA and East Malling Research with funding from the UK Commission for Employment and Skills. It is focused on improving the consistency, quality and accessibility of training for farm businesses and employers of all sizes operating in the arable, vegetable, salad crop and fruit sectors.'* Its focus is on practical skills delivered by leading experts in the subject.

ARTIS is currently funded by the Government to build the structure, online platform, network and brand, but the aim is to be self-sustaining and the farmer will pay at the point of service for courses undertaken. Courses will be designed to the specification requested by members and steering groups, have defined learning outcomes, will not be assessed, and will allow individuals to be totally flexible in creating their own development training programme. Some courses will be eligible for gaining NROSO or BASIS points.

I am really interested in the ARTIS approach as it exists to supply a structured CPD route for arable/horticultural farmers who want to learn and develop skills to be the best they can voluntarily **without any link to a statutory requirement or voluntary code.**

Access to independent advice, training skills and knowledge is vital if farmers are going to make the most of the new concepts, and maximise return from their investments as quickly as possible.

#### 6.4. Independently assessed but mandatory training

It can also be difficult to maintain the brand and usefulness of a CPD or training platform without spending on ongoing brand awareness and its benefits; and perhaps without pressure from buying groups and supermarkets. Making parts of the training mandatory, either through law or assurance scheme requirements, allows for certainty in terms of income. This may also allow resources to run and maintain a CPD database (and effectively outsources farmers' CPD recording to an outside organisation.)

However it may kill the very idea of CPD as a way for positive farmers to grow their staff.

*See Case Study 9 – BASIS – on next page.*



### Case Study 9: BASIS

In February 2016, I visited Derbyshire to learn more about BASIS. It was established in 1978 by the pesticide industry, at the request of the government, to develop professional standards for the storage, transport and use of pesticides in the agricultural industry. It was also remitted to assess the competence of staff. Therefore it is an independent standard-setting and auditing organisation. It is proud of its industry links, being a 'must' for quality assurance programmes and having independent academic accreditation.

BASIS audits some 700 commercial pesticide stores and runs training courses for store keepers but is perhaps best known by farmers for the certificate of competence in crop protection for people involved in sales, advice and usage of agricultural pesticides.

Under the same umbrella is the FACTS award which assesses proficiency for those giving advice on fertilizer and plant nutrition. Whilst the crop protection qualification is statutory, FACTS is not - unless the land/farm in question is in an NVZ. Both BASIS and FACTS benefit from a national syllabus with around 300 people a year completing the BASIS award.

However, I was surprised to learn that BASIS Registration Ltd actually offers 50 university-accredited qualifications catering from garden centre consultants to drone pilots. Also there is potential to build from the statutory qualification to diploma and degrees by a series of voluntary add-on courses.

We had an interesting discussion on the merits of mandatory and optional training. For example, Dairy Pro (a national dairy CPD scheme) is a great tool for young people coming into the industry to record their achievements and qualifications in one place (personally **I think this desire to prove skills and CPD by college leavers is overlooked by older farmers**). Sector-based CPD schemes are a good idea and mostly already exist: e.g. poultry passport, pig industry professional register PIPR - but are hard to sustain and grow without funding. Should this be done via some form of mandatory training, or through a levy body?

### 6.5. Structured mandatory schemes for an industry

At the kind invitation of Patrick Hook, I visited PD Hook in Oxford to learn more about how a large agricultural enterprise handles staff training and development. I am very grateful to Jackie Newman (Head of HR at P D Hook (Hatcheries) Ltd ) for her time. As my farming background is arable and beef, I knew little of the poultry world, so it was a steep learning curve.

The business uses the industry-recognised British Poultry Training Scheme or poultry passport. Each job role has a minimal training requirement ranging from Level 1 to Level 4. At Level 1 workers are required to have a formal induction, and attend short courses in Health and Safety, Poultry Welfare,



Bio Security and Hygiene and Manual Handling. As the levels increase then work-based Diplomas (formally NVQ's) are added plus skills such as First Aid. The scheme's requirements are linked to assurance schemes standards.

It was really interesting to hear the positives of such training; that those with few qualifications or at the start of their career get a pathway to new skills, recognised and portable within and without the industry. CPD was clearly linked to Health and Safety, not only physical safety but also mental safety e.g. stress.

I like the concept of the poultry passport. To be able to say that all farm staff have had animal welfare training, safety training etc is fantastic and should be encouraged across the whole of agriculture. However, having worked at various times on NVQs as an assessor, or internal verifier or external verifier, I am aware of the pitfalls of forcing older, experienced staff to do 'paper chasing' type qualifications. The skill, or otherwise, of the assessor and awarding body will make or break the usefulness of the diploma. Nevertheless, once the bullet has been bitten and all new staff accept it and expect to undertake the work, over a long period, it becomes a useful learning tool. In essence the passport will become a 'certificate to farm'.

There is no need to reinvent the wheel - each sector needs to find its own way e.g. PIPR, Dairy Pro etc. but I would say it may be good practice - if led by a levy body - to independently set out a framework for those employed in the sector to work towards.

However, this begs the question '**What are the minimum skills required to run a successful farm?**'.



## 7.0. A clear framework for farmers

The final part of my study was to look to draw together my thoughts and look to find a clear framework for agricultural training and CPD in other countries, to draw inspiration from. I visited Ireland and Germany.

### 7.1. Stepping stones



Marion Beecher and Páidí Kelly kindly hosted my visit to Moorepark Animal and Grassland Research and Innovation Centre near Fermoy, Ireland. Moorepark is a Teagasc centre, Teagasc – the Agriculture and Food Development Authority – is the national body providing integrated research, advisory and training services to the agriculture and food industry and rural communities.

Figure 11: Marion Beecher and Páidí Kelly at Moorepark

I had seen from visiting a number of farms all over Ireland that there was a real drive by the government and industry bodies to promote the agricultural industry. This included not only technical knowledge but the need to improve the quality of training, how it is accessed, and how careers can develop with the industry

One concept they introduced me to was an education guide: 'Stepping Stones to a Career in Dairy Farming'. The pathway and suggested career learning is laid out in the two diagrams shown below.

Figure 12. Courtesy of: 'Stepping Stones to a Career in Dairy Farming'

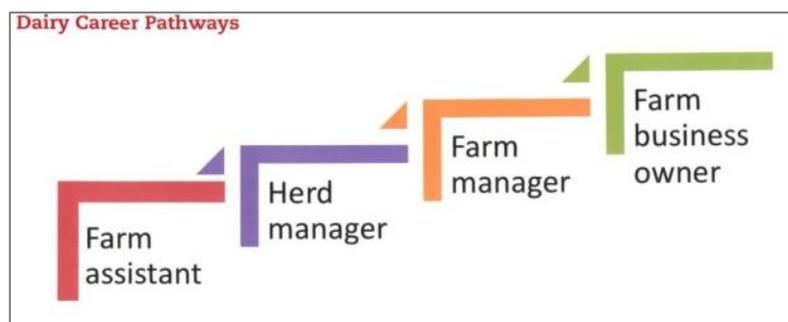




Figure 12 above outlines a very simple career structure in dairying. Figure 13 lays out the suggested formal education and the essential skills required for each step.

**Figure 13. (below). Courtesy of 'Stepping Stones to a Career in Dairy Farming'**

| Job title  | Farm Assistant  | Herd Manager  | Farm Manager  | Farm Business Owner  |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| Desirable previous dairy farm experience         | No or limited experience  | 2 years   | 3 - 4 years   | 5+ years   |
| Formal education                                 | Leaving Certificate, Level 5 Certificate in Agriculture   | Level 6 Advanced Certificate in Agriculture - Dairy Herd Management   | Professional Diploma in Dairy Farm Management or Level 7 or 8 degree (majoring in Agriculture)  | Any of the previous qualifications: Level 6 upwards  |
| Essential skills                                 | Daily farm tasks - Livestock handling, Milking, Machinery and equipment operation, Farm maintenance / Fencing, Health and safety compliance | Milking operation, Stock husbandry, Herd health and welfare, Grassland management, Health and safety compliance, Work organisation, Task supervision, Herd recording / administration | Herd management activities - Farm administration and book keeping, Farm performance evaluation, Farm software applications, Staff supervision, Communication, Time management, Health and safety management | Herd management activities - Responsible for income and expenditure, Strategic planning, Opportunity analysis, Business management, Human resources and payroll, Negotiation, Health and safety management |
| Suggested informal education                     | Teagasc Open Days and farm walks. Applied skills training (e.g. milking skills). Read the farming press (beneficial in all roles).          | Discussion groups, Technical conferences / events on grass management, breeding management, herd performance evaluation, Macra courses.   | Business, Financial and human resources training in addition to constantly improving technical knowledge.   | Business management and planning, Human resources, Personal development.   |
| Suggested skills training for career progression | Milking operation, Stock husbandry, Grassland management.   | Financial management, Farm performance evaluation, Staff supervision, Time management   | Business management, Strategic planning, Opportunity analysis, Human resources management.  | Team development and recruitment, Training and mentoring.  |

By linking the formal education provided by colleges to informal education and suggested skill training, it provides a career framework which individuals can take hold of, review progression and direct their learning. This framework is by no means unique (the 'DairyNZ Career Pathways' publication is fantastic) but is elegant in its simplicity of layout.

Paidi pointed out that, in general, New Zealand farmers have a culture where progression through sharemilking is seen as a positive thing to do, as is farm owners and young people working together collaboratively; perhaps they would see an opportunity where we would see a problem?

As a final thought we talked about what is holding farming back, and that subsidies could actually result in poor strategy and poor human capital development as they provide a 'safety net' which takes the focus off technical efficiency.

**That is a question - 'does subsidy limit the development of human capital?'**



In the UK it would be great to encourage farmers in each agricultural sector to take control of their framework, probably via levy bodies to cover some of the funding issues and independence. I believe strongly that those coming into the agricultural industry want a structured CPD programme, not only to prove their competence, but also as a means of structuring their career when they move. The days of a 'job for life' on a farm may not be completely over but they are certainly receding and businesses offering training to assist staff to learn and, potentially, move on, may well attract better candidates. Training and support is available, farmers just need to put some time and effort (and money) to find the right course.

### **Case Study 10: If you train them they might leave, if you don't train them they might stay**

Despite being busy calving 600 cows and it being his birthday, John Tully, Ballyduggan Estate, Loughrea, Ireland, kindly gave up his time for a really interesting chat on farm staff training. He acts as herd manager for a 600 cow unit, split over two blocks of 400 and 130 acres respectively. John was FBD Dairy Farmer of the Year last year. He is an active member of the Dairy discussion group run by Teagasc and is very good at setting and monitoring the achievement of key performance indicators (KPI).

#### **Put aside £1 a day for training**

John undertook a degree in civil engineering at Coventry and ended up managing 90 staff in building projects in the UK before returning to dairy farming. It was interesting to learn how this influenced his running of staff. He has set up Dairy Relief Ireland as a dairy labour supply company. He mainly recruits by word of mouth, often whilst students are completing a college qualification. He recognises the high risk nature of the farming environment and sends staff on training courses like manual handling, risk assessments, etc, as well as the more practical subjects such as AI, foot trimming and grassland management. He also holds regular "toolbox talks" on topics such as care of machinery, careful driving etc.

The use of toolbox talks - imported from the construction industry - is a simple way of promoting a safe environment and better work practices simply, relatively informally and non-confrontationally but at the same time rigorously. It was great to see Health and Safety promoted so much as part of running the farm. He also budgets 500 Euros a head for training, which as he points out, is a very small part of the overall wage bill. **He stated you have to accept that some staff will leave after receiving training but the benefits of improved performance should outweigh the training cost.** Training courses could be accessed and subsidised via organisations such as Skillsnet and the Galway Rural Development Company. John would like a more defined training programme or scheme to reflect that agriculture is a respected professional career for young people, with clear progression.



To inspire young people to enter the agricultural industry, it needs to present itself as a professional, respected career with structured training and CPD.

## 7.2. A call for good apprenticeships

Throughout my study and visits I have sought to look for inspiration for training and development once people have left formal education. I wanted to look at the forty years at work, not the three years at college. However it became very evident that some countries appeared to put far more emphasis on agricultural education, and resource development post-college. It is my personal opinion that the UK needs to look far harder at proper apprenticeships.

### Case Study 11: Germany - Hohere Landbauschule Rotthalmunster

I thought it would be interesting to visit an agricultural college in Germany and I am grateful to my brother-in-law who arranged the meeting and translated for me. The college is about 2 hours east of Munich in the heart of traditional Bavaria. Julius Tischer, one of the lecturers at the college, welcomed us and explained a little about the region.

The Passau Region land use is around one third forestry and two thirds cropped land, with a 60:40 split arable to grassland. Maize is a very common crop taken right through to grain maize with yields averaging around 9-12 t dm and wheat yields ranging from 7-9 tonnes a hectare. Around 84% of farm holdings are 50 ha or below and often required the farmers to look for a second income.

Julius Tischer then went on to explain how those students not using the university route would learn about agriculture. Typically, after leaving school, the student would spend one year at an agricultural college, followed by two years working on a farm (4 days on the farm, 1 day at college). The farmer would have to follow a structured learning programme with the student, not just have access to cheap labour. The qualification would be deemed to be at a 'farm assistant' level. Those progressing would then return to their own farms for a year to learn more and gather data and then return to college for three semesters (winter, summer, winter) to achieve a higher qualification. Whilst all topics such as dairy, arable, pig, poultry and renewables were covered, students could specialize. In this region it was often on pig production. The qualification would be to the level of "Master Farmer". Similarly, **the "Master" qualification exists for other trades, e.g. plumbing, electrician, carpentry...**

The College I was visiting would be attended after becoming a 'Master' and is one of three in Bavaria. Normally the students would be around 23 years of age, attendance is entirely voluntary, and like all other agricultural training, free of charge. There are around 40 students a year from Bavaria and across the border from Austria. Students would need to provide for board and lodgings only. The course lasts for 10 months and would result in a qualification of 'agricultural economist'.

*GREAT farmers – Growing Really Exceptional And Talented farmers: training and development in agriculture ...*

by Christopher Padfield

A Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust report ... generously sponsored by Central Region Farmers Trust



The focus is very much on economics, cash flow etc and each student would undertake a case study of their choice e.g. Bio-gas (AD plants). The lecturers are all civil servants, but are very client-orientated as, if there is no demand for the courses, the college would be shut. The programme and timetable seemed very varied and flexible. I did not meet the students as they were on a visit to China. A number of the lecturers worked part time at the college and part time on their own farms.



Figure 14: Julius Tischer (left), Chris Theopold (right) and myself (centre) outside the Hohere Landbauschule Rotthalmunster college

It was interesting to learn that the Bavarian regional government had a real vision to support the rural economy and keep communities alive. One method was by building schools/colleges to develop skills and a knowledge base, and develop entrepreneurial and creative skills to try to keep people living in the region.

Once students have left college and are working on farms, they continue to have access to advice. Up to around a decade ago this was a completely free service where a farmer could phone up and request a consultant on a particular topic. Now farmers are encouraged to form interest groups that are independent of industry. For a fee of 50 -100 Euros they would have access to 5-6 meetings a year; one-to-one advice would cost nearer 600 Euros. It was estimated that between 10-20% of farmers have joined these groups, the rest relying on advice from companies.

I was impressed with the college facilities, the large number of trial plots for arable crops, and well maintained equipment including a combine for the trial plots. The College produces a handbook which includes experimental results and data. This is an exemplary document and its level of detail was deeply impressive.

*See photos overleaf depicting respectively crop trials and the College grounds.*



Figure 15: Crop trials at Hoher Landbauschule Rotthalmunster college



Figure 16: Hoher Landbauschule Rotthalmunster college grounds



## 8.0. Assessment of the study

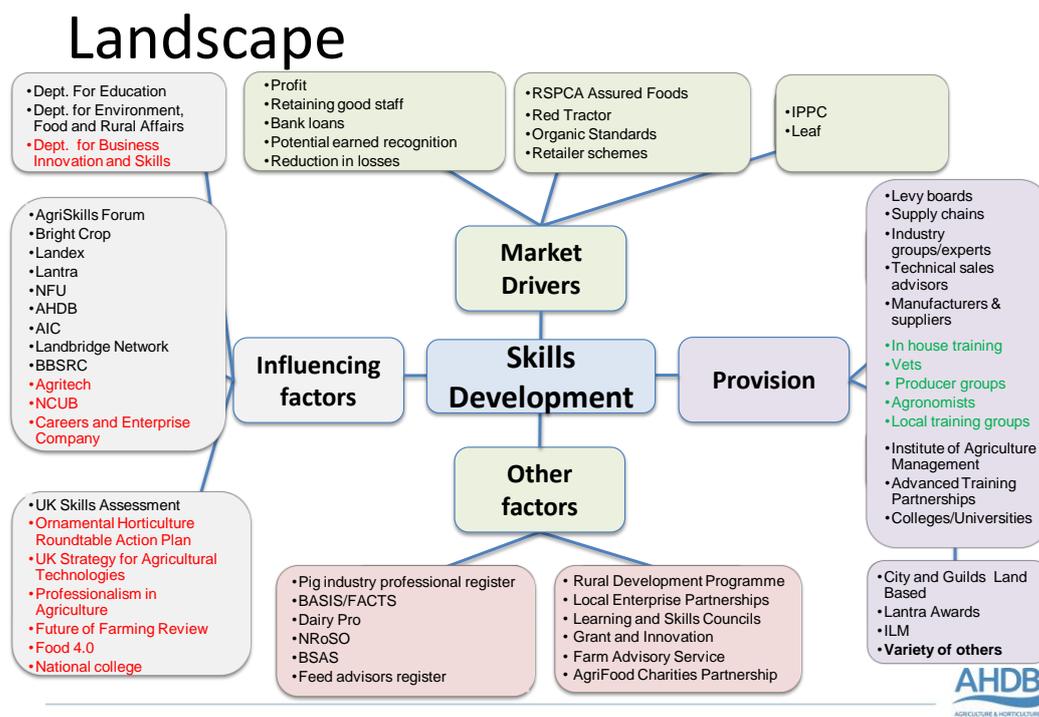
The most important element of all in the development of farm personnel – from the farmer down to the latest recruit, and regardless of the size of the operation – is that the business should have a clear vision of where it is going. Good farm businesses know where they are going and the skills and abilities they require of their staff (and themselves) to achieve their aims.

In my view training and development on farms is often underinvested in UK agriculture especially in areas such as managerial and soft skills - defining workplace culture, performance management and encouraging the right behaviours are vital competencies. **Training needs to move away from the emphasis on compliance with regulations and avoidance of penalties under subsidy schemes, to developing capacity and resilience skills.** Farmers – and farm staff - of the future will need still higher levels of competence to undertake sophisticated analysis of information both in growing crops and in marketing of produce.

Ongoing training and development, recognition of that through a CPD-type system, and career progression are all very much undervalued and disorganised in the agriculture sector. The market drivers, legislation and influencing factors bearing down on the UK farmer in terms of accessing skills development is really quite bewildering. The provision of training and CPD to farmers and growers in the UK suffers from an amazingly complex landscape of supply. There is a multitude of training providers and courses, but how do farmers identify the ones which will supply those 'future skills?'

I am very grateful to Tess Howe of AHDB for supplying the diagram (Figure 17) below which summarises it neatly:

Figure 17: supplied by AHDB





Looking at the number of bodies aiming to influence skills development it is no wonder that some UK farmers sit back and just deal with mandatory courses. Indeed as I set out on this study I deliberately looked at training provision post formal education: because investigating political and funding influences on agricultural further and higher education adds even greater layers of complexity. It is worth asking: *'Have agricultural apprenticeships actually improved dramatically over the last 20 years'?*

There are benefits to be had from a clear career structure for entrants into farming: many of those new to the industry want to prove their ability. A clearly communicated CPD pathway would be useful.

Subsidised courses are not necessarily good courses and can lead to poor human capital development. Returning to a concept mentioned at the start of the study - the 'carrot and stick' - there will be farmers not willing to engage with CPD. I believe there should be a minimum standard of competence and skill to, say, rear livestock or grow crops that will enter the food chain. If this is called a 'certificate to farm' then so be it.

This standard should be taken on and set by farmers. If not, outside pressure groups and retailers will drive the standards. To maintain independence, and to keep central records and promote brand awareness, the involvement of levy bodies may be useful. Any CPD system must be independently verified and validated without large scale administration systems and associated costs. However, farmers must pay for training - the best farmers will be accessing training, whether that be IT skills, soft skills, or accessing new information, voluntarily. An independent CPD framework would allow those entering and working in agricultural sectors to be able to plan their careers. How the individual actually accesses training on that framework will depend on local provision and preference. The UK does not lack training provision; but it suffers a profusion of different bodies and standards.

New entrants to farming may well be put off by the lack of professional recognition of the agricultural industry. A minimum skill level to produce food - a certificate to farm - needs to be set, leading to a word not used in this report until the end - Professionalism



## 9.0. Conclusions

1. **The most important element in the development of farmers and farm staff is that** the business itself should have a clear, stated vision, explained to and understood by all employees. This has more bearing than any external training scheme.
2. Training needs to move away from the emphasis on compliance with regulations and avoidance of penalties under subsidy schemes, to developing capacity and resilience skills.
3. Training should be considered an investment and not a cost.

## 10.0. Recommendations

1. There should be a minimum standard or set of qualifications to produce food – a certificate to farm
2. To inspire young people to enter the agricultural industry, it needs to present itself as a professional respected career with structured training and CPD
3. Increased emphasis in agricultural training should be placed on people management and soft skills



## 11.0. After my study tour

The eight weeks of study tour abroad and numerous day visits to individuals and companies have been fantastic in terms of personal development and the opportunity to get my head outside the farm gate.

### The Farm

In terms of our farm business it has brought a renewed focus on what we are trying to achieve. The family vision is now written down and reviewed regularly for monthly, annual and 5 + 10 year targets

I am really challenged as to whether we are doing good in our business. Randy Lewis pointed out that *'everyone should push the ball a bit further'*: so how can we make improvements to both the people and the place where we work? I think this will be involve concentration on the farmed environment, on increasing soil health, encouraging wildlife and plants within the farm, and decreasing reliance on pesticides and artificial fertilizer.

Although the monthly family meetings are chaired and minuted, I think an outside voice at least every six months will be brought in.

Look for independent advice wherever possible. I have joined NIAB TAG since commencing my Nuffield Farming Scholarship, and since completing the study tour will put more time to HGCA, monitor farm meetings, and BASE visits and forums.

### Training Company

I have already massively reduced the days spent giving training on mandatory courses. I would like to get more involved in training where personal development is given a greater focus.

During my Nuffield Farming study period I was given the opportunity to lecture to second year degree students working alongside Dr. Louise Manning and Mike Draper at the Royal Agricultural University. I really enjoyed the challenge and would like to do so again.

In addition, during the Nuffield Farming study, I was asked to act as a mentor for the Henry Plumb Foundation which I found to be rewarding and would hope to have further opportunities to do so again.

I have been asked to join the Agriskills Forum.

### Personal

Work fewer hours and travel more.



## 12.0. Executive summary

Fewer employees in UK agriculture received training over the past 12 months than in any other industry/sector. Despite a relatively low level of engagement with training and skills development within the agricultural sector, clear benefits can be seen from higher skills qualifications, use of training, and adoption of better business practices.

The primary motivation of my study was to look at businesses which do put an emphasis on the value of their workers, how they access training, and see their staff as an investment not a cost. A range of agricultural businesses was visited in France, Germany and Holland with the aim of studying smaller, typically family-owned farms. A second tour was made, as a comparison, to larger units in the USA and Canada. A trip to Ireland acted as a proving ground for theories made during the previous two tours.

Whilst there are clear differences in the level of government and agency support for training in different countries, what clearly stood out was the need to concentrate on the basics of running a successful business. These were to have a clearly defined vision of the aim and direction of the business, with recruitment, appraisals, and staff development all seen through the prism of that aim. This policy of clear direction and positive attitude to employees was much more important than any access to training opportunities or funding streams.

There are benefits to be had from a clear career structure for entrants into farming and these need to concentrate as much on soft skills as physical skills. Recording this Continuous Professional Development (CPD) ideally wants to take place at a national level to provide quality assurance and portability, though the issue of how this would be funded within each sector is open to discussion.

In the UK agriculture sector 88% of farm businesses employ four or less people and therefore are likely not to have a HR department or even a training budget. The difficulty of organising and paying for training schemes in very small businesses should not be underestimated, both in terms of arranging for staff to be away from their business duties and paying for courses when income streams are suffering. Training should be an investment not a cost.

However there is a danger that a lack of engagement by farmers in training and CPD schemes will result in a piecemeal approach to training driven by mandatory legal obligation or the demands of assurance bodies. Farmers, perhaps with the help of levy bodies, need to look to support and develop voluntary CPD schemes that they may need to pay for, rather than be driven by outside pressures. A good career structure will bring quality people into the industry, and grow and nurture talent to become the next generation of farmers.

**Chris Padfield**



## 13.0. Acknowledgement and Thanks

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