

58th ADVANCED COURSE IN AGRICULTURAL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT - Jan – Feb 2008

“I would personally recommend the Worshipful Company of Farmers business course to anyone within the farming business”.

Nick Padwick - Farmers Weekly’s 2009 “Farmer of the year” tells us why...

I am a farmer’s son from Hampshire who completed a one-year course studying Agriculture at Sparsholt College. Initially hoping to rejoin the family farm this did not materialise due to the farm being taken back in hand. I joined the Co-operative Group in 1988 as a tractor driver, starting in Hertfordshire and over a period of twenty years and three different estates progressed to manage the Co-operative Group’s farm near Leicester.

The Stoughton Estate is a 2000 hectare arable business with three contracting farm businesses and four Farm Business Tenancies. Cropping wheat, oilseed rape and beans running alongside a large 10 year Countryside Stewardship scheme with educational access.

The Co-operative Group had allowed me to progress through their business and complete many training courses. I have always believed I could succeed despite my limited formal qualifications and when the possibility of attending the Worshipful Company of Farmer’s business course was suggested I was delighted. This would give me a fantastic opportunity to

progress myself further and satisfy my desire to extend my education.

Allowing me to look at the way I run the business at Stoughton and implement changes to benefit the business now and in the future.

The process started when Lindsay Hargreaves, a past attendee of the course, nominated me, I then completed an application form and was invited for a short interview. I was accepted onto the course and a few weeks later received the information pack detailing the course and other attendees. Prior to attending the course I prepared some business notes about the Estate in case my farm was used as one of the case studies.

The agenda was very full covering all aspects of running a successful farming business, including diversification, business opportunities and threats. The course was fairly intense after not sitting in a lecture room for twenty years, it was hard to become a student again and by Friday of the first week I felt completely exhausted and I think this applied to the whole group. My head was full of new information that I wanted to fully understand and a break at the weekend was very welcome and gave me a chance to take on that information.



The first week covered financial, budgeting/accounting, business law, in

all a fairly full on week. The second and third week were a bit softer where we got to understand a bit about strategic planning, leadership skills, directorships, negotiation with media skills, and also working on case studies in teams. This involved stripping a team member's business apart looking at profitability, cash flow and the potential to evolve the business through newly acquired skills and the experience of other team members. At the end of this 10-hour process we prepared and presented our findings to the rest of the course members. The other course members then examined our assumptions, accuracy and potential for success given the new ideas put forward for that business.

This was an incredibly enjoyable process where we learnt about ourselves and other members, course members were generous with the information divulge to us about their businesses and this honesty allowed for a more realistic approach to analysing the figures.

We had the opportunity to look at a local farm that had diversified into cheese production with milk from their organic dairy herd. It was great to see how an idea had been turned into reality with passion and enthusiasm for cheese. This making for a successful business for future generations.

The days were full with course material and most evenings we had a formal dinner with a guest speaker from different parts of the farming and countryside community. We were then given the opportunity to ask questions about the specialist area that had been spoken about. A few evenings after that were spent completing case studies and preparing for the next day's lecture, a 14-16 hour day not unheard of.



This allowed us to get closer to our colleagues on the course to form good relationships that will hopefully last the rest of our careers.

To summarise I felt that the 58th course for me was valuable in understanding how other businesses work, to give me a wider perspective on other sectors within the farming community and how they all interlink and potentially how these may affect my business, from grain traders to bank managers, to become less blinkered and also the vast difference between running a business as part of a large corporation compared to an independent, family business.

I would personally recommend the Worshipful Company of Farmers business course to anyone within the farming business. I found it a challenging but extremely rewarding three weeks where I met and formed relationships with twenty other like-minded people in the agricultural sector. This has enabled me to go forward with confidence.

Freeman Nick Padwick – course delegate 2008