

Marcus Oldham College's rural leadership program is helping young people develop the skills to become leaders in the agricultural sector.

With significant changes to the mechanical, biological and information technologies in the rural sector, managers have had to adapt themselves and their businesses to cope with complexity and change. Leading farmers and graziers have needed to be proactive in creating new opportunities or they have found it very difficult to maintain their competitive edge. This need for entrepreneurial skills development has inspired many aspiring rural workers to complete leadership training.

With a reputation as one of Australia's leading agricultural institutions, it is no surprise that future leaders joined together in July 2005 to complete the rural leadership program at Marcus Oldham College in Geelong, Vic. From a range of rural industries, 27 individuals graduated from the course with the confidence to develop their professional and personal lives and to be leaders. For many, that will result in providing inspiration to other young rural Australians, encouraging them to also be role models in their field.

Sponsored by the National Australia Bank, the week-long course is now in its 14th year and focuses on broadening participants' outlooks, enhancing their personal development and building leadership abilities. Since it can be insular working on properties, it is beneficial for young people to be given the ►



opportunity to participate in leadership education and then return to their business and community and implement their ideas. For a young person entering the agricultural industry, the course also provides excellent opportunities to network with other future leaders. The program has national recognition and more than 400 graduates, many of whom are now prominent in the boardrooms of Australia's leading agricultural organisations and businesses.

Throughout the week, delegates were involved in a number of sessions and workshops outlining communication skills, public speaking, negotiation, interpersonal skills and effective leadership. Such lessons create confidence in the learner to accept, challenge and try new ideas and practices as well as equip them with skills to apply not only professionally but also within their local council, sporting clubs or community organisations. There were also several formal dinners with guest speakers including Helen Brown from ABC Radio and meteorologist Bill Kininmonth.

According to Simon Livingstone, the principal of Marcus Oldham College, the program's specific aim is to develop the leadership qualities of Australians involved in agriculture. "To prosper, Australian agriculture is increasingly reliant on developing, nurturing and training our aspiring rural leaders," Simon says. "Without investment in our people, agriculture of the future will be limited in its potential."

A range of industry groups from most states and territories of Australia were represented at the course including sheep and beef producers, wool growers, prime lamb and dairy producers



Clockwise from above: (L-r) Dairy consultant Jo Hawker and wool producers Tim McShane and Ben Chandler; leadership course participant Rachael Turner; (l-r) Tim McShane, Scott Farquharson and Ian McLean develop new leadership skills.

as well as consultants and rural bankers. There were also representatives from apiculture and viticulture industries.

Among those who have graduated from the course is wool producer Ben Chandler, originally from Barcaldine, Qld, but currently working on Baratta Station, near Deniliquin, NSW. Ben is one of many people involved in the wool industry who have been sponsored by Riverina Stud Merino Field Day to complete the rural leadership program. He says he was recommended to undertake the course by a fellow wool producer, and now believes it is one of the best things he has completed. He has decided to further his study by enrolling in the Diploma of Agribusiness at Marcus Oldham in 2006. "The program furthered my communication and management skills that I will be able to develop on personal, business and industry levels," he says.

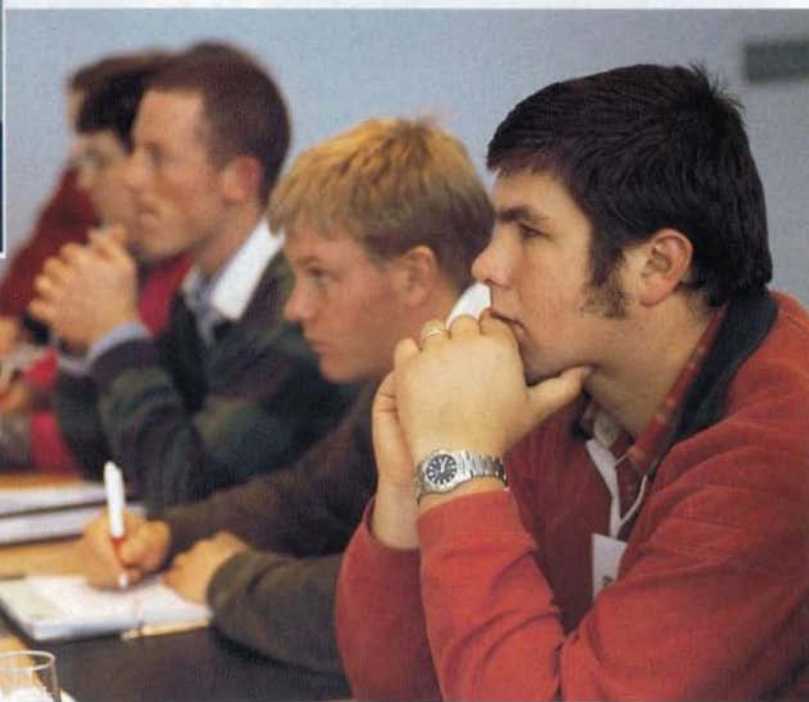
Dairy consultant Jo Hawker, of Warrnambool, Vic, has also graduated from the course. She says that the week provided her with the personal growth and confidence that will assist her in becoming a leader in the dairy industry. "You have to have certain credentials to be an industry leader, and I believe the rural leadership course has provided me with the development tool," she says.

Travelling all the way from Alice Springs to complete the course was 25 year-old Ian McLean, who currently works with Farm Biz. He says the communication and leadership skills he took away from the week were invaluable.



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– Simon Livingstone, Marcus Oldham College.



"I would recommend the course to anyone who wants to succeed as a rural leader across any industry," he says. "Not only in work-related situations, but also in personal ones."

Tasmanian wool producer and mixed farming manager, Tim McShane, is proof that leadership skills in rural industry are not only necessary in service and banking sectors. Tim currently runs his family property and says that the negotiating and people management skills that he took away from the week will be put to frequent use in the day-to-day operation of the farm.

"When managing staff you will always have to deal with different personalities, which can at times cause conflict," he says. "It is such an important management skill to be able to deal with each situation."

The future of the rural sectors will increasingly rely on the leadership skills of its people. Whether managing a large-scale beef operation in the Gulf Country or the Kimberley, a sheep station in New South Wales or an intensive operation in the south of Tasmania, development of management and leadership skills of individuals will be critical to the future success of the agricultural sector.