

## OFC/DLG Travel Scholarship 2016

### Eurotier 2016: My experience as an Oxford Farming Conference Scholar

Oscar Smith

My trip to Eurotier was an experience that I will not be forgetting in a hurry and even before we set off I felt extremely blessed to have been given the opportunity to represent the Oxford Farming Conference at such a prestigious international event. I was relishing the opportunity to speak to many different people from a variety of backgrounds with a whole host of experiences. Prior to the event I knew very little about the DLG, however, I was impressed with the organisation from the start and gained greater admiration the more I learnt about them. I found it most interesting hearing from many people who farmed in other countries, about their current challenges as well as the achievements that they were proud of within their industry. The most notable answer I received to the question 'What is the biggest problem/ struggle within German agriculture?' was given as 'The European Union, but having said that, we wouldn't be so daft as to leave!'. Eurotier is home to many innovations within the livestock sector and this is something that the DLG has a large interest in. Whilst at Eurotier Robert Yardley and Tom Allen-Stevens did a marvellous job of organising meeting with some exceptional business men and women at the top of their industry and being able to spend ten minutes in their company was invaluable.

Invariably we would start each of our days with a trip to a well known fast food restaurant and this proved to stimulate some interesting conversation between us scholars each morning about our industry and the challenges we perceive to be facing in the immediate and longer term future. This proved interesting and we were then able to take our thoughts into the Eurotier and take our discussions further with those people that we met during the day. Some of the main topics of conversation included, the need for better marketing as the British Agricultural industry, the need for louder and clearer communications with Government, a need for farmers to have greater involvement in agricultural research and better communication between producer and consumer.

The need for a greater understanding between producer and consumer is also apparent on the continent, the fringe event that we attended on the first evening focussed quite heavily on the issues surrounding educating the consumer that a higher standard of welfare in pork production, would have to result in an increase in food price. Much of the livestock production in Germany is Poultry, Milk and Pork. I was surprised to learn that there are not many sheep kept in Germany.

On the Wednesday of our week away we visited a large German estate. The estate comprised of forestry, timber trading, property and agricultural enterprises. The estate had also taken an unusual diversification into a woodland cemetery. This was specifically for those wishing to bury a loved ones ashes which was very uncommon in Germany as family members are not usually able to retain possession of the ashes after cremation. The cemetery enterprise is 50ha of woodland and each tree within the woodland has 12 burial places priced around €500 each! The agricultural enterprise was arable based and comprised of 808ha of Grade 1 silty soil. The enterprise was run so that 0.45 of a man was used per 100ha of land and 5.5 tractor hours per hectare. Tractors on the estate are fitted with automatic steering systems and everything was done in house apart from the use of

contractors to spread digestate, lime and mushroom soil onto the land. Whilst on our visit, Rob quizzed hard about the pest, weed and disease issues on the estate. After some careful translation and the help of Google images it was established that on this estate these were similar to the challenges faced in Britain.

Our next stop after Bredenbeck was the KWS seed headquarters in Einbeck. Upon arrival we were treated to lunch and after this given detailed explanations of the research and manufacturing process of maize and sugar beet seed including growing and producing for seed. After this we had a tour of the site and viewed the seed storage areas as well as the packaging plant.

As previously mentioned the DLG strive to encourage innovation within agriculture and some of my favourites included a robotic machine that unrolled your silage sheets for you and also an electrically driven push along feeder wagon which I thought could be useful on British farms where old and small buildings are still being used to rear stock. This small feeder wagon would offer the opportunity to take a total mixed ration to stock in those buildings. I also have a large interest in direct retailing from farm to the general public so was pleased to see some vending machines on display for milk and other products. I also valued speaking to exhibitors and farmers alike about the merits of utilising a vending machine on the farm. It was pleasing to hear of one farmer who had become well know for the 'Shed' that has been placed with a window into their poultry shed and a vending machine inside and the project sounds like a real success story for all involved.

Rob and Tom arranged at least six meetings for us scholars to attend, these people ranged from feed consultants and breeding consultants to the head of DeLaval's PR team and BASF the chemical company who have a hand in the nutrition sector and were proud to tell us of the many other household items their technology had a part to play in creating. I found particular interest in the feed consultant from Ireland who was doing some great work in researching the nutritional effects for ruminants of soil management.

As a Norfolk boy it was great to see with Jonathan Barber of Crogham Farm, Wymondham. Jonathan had funded himself to attend the event with some Charollais sheep and seemed to be doing a fantastic trade whilst he was there. The AHDB also had a stand at Eurotier promoting the British export market but it was a shame that there was not more of a British presence within the livestock hall and maybe this is something that we could look to capitalise on as an industry in the future.

Overall the experience was most beneficial and really opened my eyes to even more possibilities for our industry and for myself as an individual in the industry and for that I would like to thank the Oxford Farming Conference for providing me with the opportunity to attend Eurotier aswell as our wonderful hosts in Germany the DLG and I look forward to returning the favour in January 2017. I would also like to pay a special thanks to Robert Yardley who worked tirelessly to organise a fantastic trip and secure superbly located accommodation, all around his own exceptionally busy schedule. Also a huge thank you to Tom Allen-Stevens for taking the time to join us, his passion for the conference and connecting young people was clear to see and greatly appreciated.