



## Travel & Training Bursary Report

**FFN member:** Kristy McGregor, NZ

**Event:** National Farmers' Federation (NFF) National Congress, Canberra – 20 & 21 October 2014

On 21st October I was fortunate to attend the NFF Congress, a culmination of ideas and discussion between farm representative bodies and key industry players. As an Australian woman now living on a dairy farm in NZ and working for Federated Farmers of New Zealand, I was interested to see the contrast between the Australian context and the conversations we are having in New Zealand.

As a Field Officer, a constant challenge for us is how we as an organisation engage our members in realising the value of policy and advocacy work that we do. It is apparent that this same challenge exists for those farm representative bodies in the agriculture sector, whether you are a country such as NZ that relies on Agriculture for 70% of exports, a country such as Australia that was built on the sheep's back.

At the conference the Newgate Review into the Future of Australian Farm Sector Representation was released. It examines how farm sector representation can provide the strongest voice for farmers. On engagement, 98% of farmers wanted to be informed about campaigns on issues affecting them, with half wanting to be consulted for views and input. Just under one third wanted to be involved in the decision making process. In terms of consultation, email was most preferred (71%) followed by online surveys (58%), receiving a phone call (34%), and participating in a members only forum (26%).

The Report indicates the need for a significant change in the organisation of the Australian sector, proposing four options, of which they suggest that interviews with stakeholders and farmers concludes maintaining the current status quo is not an option. The most popular option is the unified model, in which farm sector organisation will occur under one umbrella organisation. This will provide one brand and consistent messaging and promotion, a national fees structure and budget; reduce the gap between national representation and the farmer, through providing a direct relationship.

Discussion with state farming organisations in Australia reveals an awareness of the challenges facing the sector, and a strong desire to shift to a practice that best suits the demands of the sector. For the Australian farming sector this is a period of change which is both exciting and daunting, and there will be further upcoming challenges and uncertainty for state farming organisations as the NFF member organisations discuss the proposal outlined in the Newgate Review and map out their future.

Over the past three to five years, state farming organisations have been required to change their strategy in order to survive the economic, social and cultural climate. Many organisations have looked to better ways to engage their membership, shifting from a sales team focus to the running of events to engage members and recruit new members. They are also becoming better at



communicating the stories from the farming sector with the wider community, so that the value of their policy and advocacy work is better understood.

Attending the conference provided me with an opportunity to engage with leaders from the various state based farming organisations and industry levy bodies, and get a better understanding of the challenges facing the sector. The development and renewing of these networks is vital. It is through the bringing together of bright minds, and young leaders such as Sam Collier, of Australian Agriculture, who offered a though provoking presentation on engaging young people in agriculture, that as a Trans-Tasman region, we find strength as an industry.

Thank you to FFN for the opportunity to attend the NFF Congress, and for continually providing us as young ones in the industry with the opportunity to reach our full potential.

*Kristy McGregor*