

## **Jenni Thompson, 2015 OFC Travel Scholar – Report on Agritechnica experience**

### **Overview:**

In January 2015 the Oxford Farming Conference announced the launch of their travel scholarship award with the Young DLG in Germany. The aim of the exchange was to offer young people in British and German agriculture a valuable learning opportunity at two leading agricultural events.

### **Who are the DLG?**

On asking a fellow HAUC graduate about the DLG he summarised it saying “they are a great organisation who test all new kit in agriculture - if a piece of kit fails on a DLG test, you might as well not market it”. A highly respected authority of agricultural technologies across the world, I liken the DLG to the UKs consumer body “Which” – for the agricultural world – but they are so much more besides.

The DLG, or German Agricultural Society, was established in 1885 by Max Eyth – a German agricultural engineer whose ambition it was to better develop German agriculture to be more efficient and productive through technical and scientific progress.

The DLG is a politically independent membership organisation, open to all who have an interest in their work. By the end of the week, even we delegates were signed up as members by the president himself – Carl-Albrecht Bartmer, a farmer from the Saxony region.

The DLG issue reports and conduct tests on farm technology and farm inputs and are the leading testing and certification services in the agricultural sector. With the help of their results farmers and practitioners are given the right information and resources to aid decision making when investing in new equipment of systems on farm.

### **The DLG and OFC**

The partnership of the Junge DLG and the Oxford Farming conference was developed to enable scholars from both countries the opportunity to network, enable knowledge transfer and share ideas and information . In January the OFC hosted two delegates from the Junge DLG, Stefan Cramm and Malte Isermeyer. In return they hosted myself, Nicola Blowey and Robert Yardley at Agritechnica in November 2015, our trip included:

- Entry to an exclusive awards evening for agricultural technological innovation – Max Eyth event (where 2000 guests were in attendance from all the major machinery manufacturers and hospitality was complimentary!)
- Two farm tours in the Hanover region
- A visit to KWS seeds with a presentation on their work in Sugar beet and beyond
- Tickets to Agritechnica across three days
- Hospitality at Agritechnica in the international lounge and at an evening reception of the Junge DLG
- Access to the Junge DLG conference- an opportunity to hear about farming in England, Brazil, Holland and Austria

- Tickets to the Young Farmers Party – with VIP passes to an exclusive lounge with food and refreshments
- A warm welcome from the lovely Leonie Hug – who kept an eye on us throughout our trip ensuring we made the most of all that was on offer.

### **Farm visits**

For our first full day in Germany, we were taken on some farm and agribusiness visits in the Hanover region – we even had time for a Schnitzel in a lovely Einbeck pub.

The tours taught me a lot about the development of farming practises in Germany. Many farms work in partnership or as co-operatives – making the most of each respective member’s strengths and pooling resources to maximise productivity and profit. This is something we see little of in the UK but which highlighted how useful it could be to keeping smaller farms in business. The further east you go, the more common co-operatives are – a legacy of the division of Germany in the Cold War.

Farm land in Germany is graded on a scale of 0-100 – with 0 being poor and 100 being excellent – or as I pointed out to our host – “boys land” - you don’t need to know a lot and you can grow anything! The area we visited is largely in arable use because of the good quality land – the German philosophy on land use seems to be it is better to use good quality land for production than to cover it in buildings. It was clear that productivity is central to building development strategies here – a refreshing change to the mass of development for housing we see in the UK. Crops grown at the farms we visited included sugar beet, maize, wheat and oilseed rape –many of the farms in the surrounding areas did not appear to be dissimilar.

In terms of training, Germany has an excellent tradition of a farm apprenticeship system, at Hofspielgelberg (Mirror Mountain) farm, our host, Moritz Ehle, did a two year apprenticeship after school before going on to study a four year agricultural course at college. Land based colleges were in abundance at Agritechnica and it was great to see how integral they are to the industry there. Our host’s family had farmed at Hofspielgelberg since 1910 – prior to which it was state owned. As with all farms of a certain age the challenges of building size were evident, the Ehle’s have overcome this through practical uses such as a cow barn now being used to store corn and diversification – offering a livery and indoor ménage.

The farm also had a significant investment in the form of a biomass plant – green energy was very much in evidence at Agritechnica with three exhibition halls dedicated to energy plants production and renewables. Moritz explained that there was a great deal of funding for such developments in Germany. Here they used sugar beet and maize to fuel the plant with the highest payment given on the first 150kwh of energy obtained. Cannily they ensure the energy is used on farm first before feeding the grid, keeping overheads low. It is expected that the costs of the plant will be repaid in 8-9 years, and with a contract of 20yrs set up an electricity supplier it stands to make a good profit.

Looking forward we discussed the challenges and opportunities ahead for the farming partnership., Moritz predicted that with the increase in government regulations precision agriculture will play a key role – regulations on nitrogen and associated leaching are coming into play now and further regulations will make things like cover cropping and soil analysis vital to a farm business. It was suggested that precision farming tools could help this, but whilst Moritz agreed, he was loathe to

invest in the technology at present – commenting it is better to see how the technology develops before you invest – a great lesson to take to any walk of life. But when asked if money was no object what would he invest in – the answer was resounding and something I think all farmers would agree – more land!

## **Agritechnica**

When I read on Twitter that Agritechnica draws an average of 450,000 visitors – a population the size of Edinburgh, my first thoughts as a girl of 5ft 1” was ‘I hope there is a “lost persons” bureau!’

In actual fact I needn’t of worried – the visitor numbers may be big but so is the site, a 10mile perimeter and 32 exhibition halls there was plenty of space and plenty to see – not to mention some great guides to greet us while we were there.

Our sponsor for the trip was Massey Ferguson, and so naturally, during our first day at the show we met with Campbell Scott, Director, Sales Engineering and MF Brand Development who arranged several meetings with lead staff at both Massey Ferguson and AGCO, as well as ensuring we had a comprehensive tour of the magnificent AGCO hall which housed their brand stand.

During the show we also met with staff from Pottinger and Lemken and were given excellent opportunities to discuss their work and ask questions. It was a great opportunity to have the time of some very high profile staff within these major brands, and be able to ask the questions you always wanted to – those kind of opportunities don’t happen every day – but this is a door that the OFC can open for you and one which I was delighted to take.

The thing I found most heartening about all the brands we spoke to was how passionate they were about their brand and products, and more importantly their end user. Sometimes in life you feel that the end consumer gets a raw deal, but in agriculture the farmer is at the forefront of all the manufacturers minds – in research and development and in future market terms, the brands consider a diverse range of factors to ensure their product meets the needs and desires of the farmers who use them. All the brands also considered the investment in future staffing – encouraging innovation in their staff through ideas sharing (Pottinger reward staff for ideas that are put into production), training and care to keep them in the fold.

Agritechnica is also a fantastic stage where agriculture engineering achievement is celebrated through the innovations awards, presented at the Max Eyth event. In all 5 gold medals were awarded and a further 44 silver medals. One of my personal favourites fell under the AGCO house in the form of the Fendt Vario Grip Pro (Gold medal), which offers in cab tyre pressure control at the touch of a button (0.8 to 1.8 bar in 30seconds) aiding field work at low, soil friendly pressures – ultimately reducing compaction. I was also impressed by the Massey Ferguson Pro Cut system installed on their MF 2200 series large square balers. Their simple drop down bed which houses the knives in a roll out magazine enables easy repair and servicing and is a huge tick in the box when it comes to farm safety. Definitely one of those “why didn’t anyone think of that before” products.

As a scientist (and a bit of an environmentalist), the other excellent technological development for me was the presence of so many IT packages. These were aimed at the whole farm management – precision farming tools helping businesses to maximise on productivity, profit and environment by using programmes which process data from all aspects of the farm business – be it soil mapping,

harvest yields, soil analysis, even energy consumption and livestock cycles. Many of the major brands offer their own solutions to this but in my mind 365FarmNet are leaders in this field. Users are offered a basic package for free, from which they can buy add-ons to build a database fit for their farm. This can be achieved without expensive outlays – no matter the age of the equipment through 365FarmNet, farmers can buy add-ons for their existing kit to record data. With just 4000 of the 350,000 German farms on board, the company has a long way to go, but in my opinion is certainly a model which could gain international recognition.

### **Concluding thoughts.**

As I write this report Christmas is not far around the corner, and another Oxford Farming Conference looms ahead which I cannot wait to attend. This year has been fantastic for me in terms of getting to submerge myself in an industry I love. I have learnt a lot about the developments in agriculture since my parents were farming, and it has offered the most exceptional opportunity to meet with leaders in agriculture, share knowledge and experience and meet some wonderful people.

It has been interesting to see the similarities and differences between the opportunities seen at home and abroad but for me – how often do you get to see farming in 4 countries compared back to back over two hours as we did at the Young DLG Conference. One thing is certain; agriculture is a world of opportunity to new entrants, both on farm and in business and I certainly relished the chance to see agriculture beyond our shores and I would wholeheartedly recommend anyone apply for the travel scholarship you never know what awaits you!