



OFC/DLG Travel Scholarship 2016

EuroTier, Hannover

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Introduction

Having attended the Oxford Farming Conference in January 2016 as a scholar (sponsored by the Kent County Agricultural Society) and being from a livestock background I was very keen to be part of the travel scholarship to EuroTier the premier livestock event in Europe. Therefore I was ecstatic to be selected as part of the scholarship program and even more so to be asked to present to Junge DLG as part of our time there!

Our Hosts and the Trip

The DLG are one of the main farming groups in Germany, they are known for testing all of the new tractors and arable equipment scrupulously and are one of the most trusted sources for independent testing in Europe. However they also test equipment such as cow brushes and automatic milking robots to the same high standards. The DLG also produce a series of advice leaflets called Expert Knowledge designed to try to keep their members at the top of their game. During our time at EuroTier we were hosted members of the Junge DLG, a section of the DLG. We were treated to a fantastic reception on the first night together with some great speakers around the topic animal welfare and modern farming, contradiction or the future. Dr Martin Scholten spoke about the effects of regulation on welfare, and how regulation tends to be single issue and can end up stifling innovation rather than improving welfare and developing solutions to increase welfare. Robert Hoske was talking about animal welfare verses economy and the effects that differing welfare regulations by counties have on the bottom line of livestock businesses and the decision making process of consumers.

During the week we had three days of access to the trade fair, I have never seen anything of the like! Apart from walking round the show we managed to get some time talking to companies on stands as well as looking at some of the innovation launches. Three days hardly seemed enough time to get round all of it but here are some of the highlights for me.

My particular interests lie in genetics so it was fantastic to sit down with Gerbrich Andringa from Cogent to talk about the Cogent's involvement in Asia and Africa and how cattle are being developed in those countries as well as how those countries are collecting data and their aims for their breeding programmes. Alice and I also spoke to StGenetics about the differences on how they work as a semen company without their own studs, and the trends of genetics and the use of sexed semen within Europe.

Topigs, a pig genetics company, was really interesting to talk to, especially about the level of investment in genetics in the pig industry. I also got a chance at looking at developments in semen

testing, I used to work for a pig semen company and I was a great opportunity to see the developments in that industry.

Data collection was a really big topic at the show, especially with the move to be monitoring everything possible and how we join together the different apps and programmes that we already use under one piece of software to make it easier to keep track of the data collected especially in a mixed farm type of environment. The question we asked every company we spoke to was who owned the data inputted into these programmes and would it be sold to third parties. Without exception every company we spoke to said that the data belonged to the farmer and that data safety was an important part of their business.

One stand visit that opened my eyes was our time spent on the BASF stand. It was interesting to learn how much they did with in the livestock industry, I had always thought of them as a chemical company producing for the arable business.

The DLG also judge the EuroTier innovation awards where new products can be awarded medals when judged against strict criteria and out of the 251 eligible products this year there were just 4 golds and 21 silvers awarded. The innovations came from every sector and covered management needs such as an app that uses sensors to test water quality remotely in everything from water troughs to water lines in milking systems, to feeding innovations such as milk transporters to keep milk at the correct temperature over large distances to feed calves but also uses smart tags to automatically issue the correct amount of milk to calves based on individual feeding curves. From the gold medals I was particularly interested in the Eartag LIFE product, an ear tag that has the ability to monitor cattle for the entirety of their lives on farm it is also light weight so can be used from day 1 and can monitor inside or at pasture. This has the potential (if used in conjunction with management software) to revolutionise how we manage herds, managing the individual rather than the group and optimise the performance of the cattle, the system also aims to help with assurance, behaviour monitoring and reducing time spent on normal husbandry tasks.

We were also very lucky to be able to go on 2 visits while we were in Germany courtesy of the Junge DLG. The first visit was to a family run farm that was arable and forestry mainly but their diversification was as a final resting site. One thing I learnt in Germany was that under German law you cannot bury anyone anywhere or scatter ashes anywhere you want, to the point that when you collect ashes from the crematorium they come in a completely sealed container. These remains have to be buried in a certified place. The diversification on the farm is that they have turned over some of the forest to be a certified site. This site is certified for 100 years and they sell sections around trees, dependant on size and position, they also offer an area where ceremonies can be held. Based on the quick maths we were doing in the mini bus this could be an incredibly lucrative diversification!!

We were also treated to a talk and tour around KWS seeds. I admittedly am not fantastic with arable but it was really interesting to see how the seed were treated and processed so they were ready to be planted. The methods of tracing the batches around the system and the length that KWS got to for the customer to ensure quality and emergence was amazing. It was also interesting to learn about their regional breeding programme. This breeding programme will be beneficial as a plants will be adapted to the local environment rather than KWS as a global company trying to get plants to produce optimally in Europe that were developed in the USA for example.

As I mentioned in my introduction I was asked to do a presentation for the Junge DLG as part of the trip. I was asked to do a presentation titled 'Do It Yourself: Identifying and Exploring Markets', my

presentation was based around my future plans for the family farm when I get the opportunity to take over. The other members on the panel were talking about the developments of the current products, bug burgers, cheese using regional provenance as a selling point and using rearing methods as a selling point for pork. It was a fantastic opportunity to present even if the instant translation was really weird!

Final Thoughts

EuroTier was a fantastic experience and being able to go and see some of the upcoming technology in the industry was brilliant. Everyone we spoke to from every company made some reference to data collection, this is going to be such a big area for development in the future. Data ownership is going to be key. Collecting all of this data could be a fantastic resource for individual businesses as long as they can interpret the data correctly and they can use it to measure the progress of their business.

I have to reiterate my thanks to the Oxford Farming Conference directors for selecting me to go on the trip, I have learnt an incredible amount while over at EuroTier and it was a great opportunity to meet and talk with the members of the Junge DLG. I have to thank Robert Yardley and Ton Allen Stevens for being our escorts and guides over the week, I hope they had as much fun as we did! To Alice and Oscar, as my fellow travel scholars, for being such great traveling companions and helping me have such a great week! Of course I also have to thank the Junge DLG for being amazing hosts and arranging such great farm tours as well as generally looking after us while we were there.

Finally to any scholars reading this, or potential scholars for that matter, don't put off applying for the conference or the scholarship. The conference and scholarship will challenge you and your perceptions of the industry, you will learn such a lot not only about the industry but about yourself and get the opportunity to spend time with some of the most influential people in the industry and talk to some amazing experts in their field. My best advice is to put yourself out there and seize the opportunities that this conference could provide.