

## **24<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Agricultural Conference Next Generation Facilitators Report.**

The Next Generation Group at the 24<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Agricultural Conference consisted of 61 delegates representing 14 Countries. All but two delegates who were booked were in attendance - a young Kenyan delegate experiencing visa problems at the last minute and our Indian NG from DORDS being admitted to hospital on the day of his scheduled departure.

Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> June saw NG delegates attend the NG Forum “Welcome Session 1” held at the Roxburgh Hotel. This two hour session allowed Janelle Anderson as Forum Leader and Anna Clare Seymour along with myself as NG Facilitators to introduce ourselves and give delegates a preview of the conference ahead. It also allowed time for every delegate to introduce themselves and to place a pin in a world map at the position of their home town. Jane Guise also gave an outline of what was to be expected at the combined session with CEO’s, which I think assisted greatly with the smoother running of this part of the conference. The “Welcome Session” start to the NG program was extremely worthwhile and will hopefully continue to be a part of the NG program at future conferences.

Another new inclusion into the NG program was the “Welcome Supper” specifically for NG delegates that followed the welcome session. The supper was held at a restaurant near to the conference hotel and was a resounding success, the whole room abuzz with conversation as delegates got to know one another better. There was a lot of effort made to ensure pre tour delegates, past NG delegates as well as first time NG delegates all mixed well together amongst the delegation as a whole. The result was an exceptional display of interaction throughout the whole group, which set the standard for the days ahead.

Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> June saw the NG forum itself commence at 9.10am, while the 10 minute delay in commencement was made up during the day I suggest for future that a start time 15 minutes prior to the actual start is advertised to delegates.

The forum commenced with welcome and background introductions given by Janelle Anderson, Billy Yarr and Philip Bolam. These were all most well received and I think gave delegates a very clear understanding of what the RASC is all about and what we hope they will gain from their RASC involvement, as well of course the gains the RASC hopes to make from their involvement through its substantial investment in the NG program.

The Forum moved along with 15 minute presentations from 4 of the NG delegates in attendance. Alex Haswell spoke of her work since she attended the RASC Calgary conference in setting up a NG group attached to the Royal Norfolk Show. Joanne Jeffery and Cariann Johnson spoke of their intersociety exchanges in Australia and the UK, making very good cases for why we should be ensuring these exchanges continue as an important part of RASC’s work. David Damoder from India spoke of his work with poor subsistence farmers and the enormous challenges faced by those wishing to make a difference through fostering agricultural extension, health care and

education messages in poor rural areas, here the group heard of programs with real success stories attached to them as an example of what is both worthwhile and achievable. The fourth NG presentation came from John Fyall of Scotland, John's presentation titled "The Challenges and Opportunities for the Next Generation of Scottish Farmers" came straight from the heart and gave delegates who had not been fortunate enough to be on the pre tour a real feel for Scottish agriculture. This presentation also demystified the issues behind some of the points that were to be raised during the conference itself over the coming days.

The keynote speaker of the NG forum was John Campbell OBE, Scotland's biggest independent egg producer. John's 45 minute presentation seemed to be over in the blink of an eye – the true sign of a great presentation. The NG were entertained, inspired and educated by what John had to say about his life's work in agriculture and how he made his path from a small door to door operator to the massive scale of his enterprise today. We could not have asked for a better keynote speaker.

Other presentations during the forum were from:

Alison Motion of the Royal Highland Education Trust possibly the most successful agricultural education arm of any RASC member society.

Catherine Clarke from the Royal Commonwealth Society who explained why the Commonwealth is as relevant now as it was 60 years ago and what is being done to re energise youth to be passionate about it.

Bernie O'Sullivan from RASNSW who gave a thorough presentation on their Youth Group and why the RASNSW Council see it as so important to their organisation today.

During the working lunch groups discussed a range of topics, making recommendations and suggestions on issues as diverse as:

- The Global Food Challenge and how Agricultural Societies should be educating the public
- Our greatest concerns for the future of youth in Agriculture are....
- Getting the environmental message across at a show
- Succession Planning in your Agricultural Society and bridging the age divide
- How to motivate youth to participate in rural affairs in general
- The biggest challenges facing shows today are.....
- Ways to improve the appeal of show competitions to exhibitors and the general public
- The reasons for our involvement in our member societies are.....
- Urban and rural sustainability
- Food Crops or Fuel crops, what is the right message for agricultural Societies to send?

The afternoon joint session with CEO's was focused on group discussion of the results of various exit polls from RASC member societies. Groups analysed the results and made comment and recommendation, not only on the answers given by the public, but also on the effectiveness of this form of success measurement. The result was the debate held in the morning of day three of the conference where two opposing teams argued the statement "That Shows must respond to public demand". I felt the

debate was a fitting culmination to the issues discussed during the joint session and an entertaining way to present an overall view of the various opinions raised. Full credit needs to be given to those who took up the challenge to be involved in the debate for their diligence towards its presentation which went over very well at the conference. There is no doubt this idea can be developed further and improved for future conferences.

The conclusion to the NG forum was a presentation on the NG Mission to PNG from Kara Craig and a proposal for a further Mission to Singapore and India in 2011 presented jointly by Chelsea Wan from Singapore and myself - a very appropriate end to a full day of interesting speakers, relevant topics and excellent group participation.

The NG continued to participate during the days of the conference with the same enthusiasm they had during the forum, they asked some thought provoking and considered questions, assisted by acting as microphone runners and continued to mix exceptionally well not only with their fellow NG but more importantly with RASC delegates themselves. They continued to socialise well after conference sessions and despite some very late nights were all in attendance for every session. I have no doubt some friendships newly formed in Edinburgh amongst them will last a lifetime. Leona Dargis, the Forum Leader for 2012 put together a very well arranged "treasure hunt" through Edinburgh, which cemented friendships and gave many of the group a whirlwind tourist view of our extraordinary host city.

As NG Facilitator my personal thanks go to Anna Clare Seymour for the enormous amount of mostly quiet and unseen assistance she gave to me. Janelle Anderson did a sterling job as Forum Leader and host. John Dyke and his team at the RHASS could not have done more to ensure the NG were made to feel welcome and to give them every opportunity to experience Scottish life. Billy Yarr and the Trustees of course made the whole NG Scottish experience possible with many, many hours of preparation for and execution of the conference itself.

My final words are for the NG themselves who were, bar none a credit to themselves, their home societies and the RASC. The 24<sup>th</sup> RASC conference was a success for the Next Generation delegates and gives us an excellent platform to work from to see further development of the NG concept for the 2012 Zambian RASC Conference.

John Bennett  
Next Generation Facilitator.