

The story of a wealthy bike mechanic and his heritage: Finest world class farmers

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January 2020 – all of a sudden my phone rang: "We thought of you. You are pretty cosmopolitan, especially when it comes to agriculture. You have already seen a bit of the world and you can have a say. And you speak English well".

When I was supposed to report on my internship at a dairy farm in my former high school back in 2014, I would never have imagined that milking cows would take me to a tropical island at the other end of the world.

Although I grew up as a real farmer's daughter - between pigs and in the fields - I lost sight of farming as a teenager and began to study business administration after A-levels. Halfway through, however, my research and hands-on spirit and urge to discover things needed satisfaction and I applied for a year of practical training to go to work on a dairy farm in New Zealand. After a few days and a good 200 hectares on which I dug thistles with my gravedigger, I was finally allowed to milk. My inner fire for agriculture really started to flare up again and the practical year kicked off with more tasks and increasing responsibilities.

Back at university, near the end of my business studies, I happened to meet my former class teacher (and neighbour), who was well informed by my father about my time in New Zealand. Bluntly, she asked me if I couldn't share my experiences and my so "reclaimed agricultural passion" at high school. From then on, without being aware of it, I did more and more agricultural public relations work, gained valuable experiences and networked with farmers around the world.

Then - as mentioned in the beginning – it was January 2020 and my phone rang. The specific question I was asked from the other end of the line rather knocked my socks off. Whether I wanted to travel to Australia as an Ambassador for Nuffield Farming Scholarships - an international agricultural scholarship program - to take part in an agricultural conference with farmers from all over the world known as the 'Contemporary Scholars Conference' to exchange ideas and challenges and visit farms. All on the condition that I bring my impressions back to Germany in order to then also establish this scholarship program back at home for farmers from Germany.

I think my answer was limited to a few words like, "I don't understand the question but of course I'm in! When does it start?" Flights, visa, and contacts onsite were confirmed, and I headed to Frankfurt Airport. In front of a mirror on the elevator, I looked at myself and suddenly a grin spread across my face. There it was again - the agrarian research spirit paired with a thirst for travel, and once again it went to the other end of the world - once again in the name of agriculture.

The Lord of Agriculture

But what exactly is Nuffield Farming Scholarships about? Lord Nuffield, an ambitious two-wheeler and automobile manufacturer from the United Kingdom, had no children at the time, but made a lot of money from hard work and suffered chronically from hypochondria (the compulsive fear of illness).

With this fear being on his tail and a lot of money, he founded a foundation in 1943 that awarded scholarships to students at Oxford University to study illnesses on study trips worldwide and then bring the knowledge they gained back to England. In 1947 this scholarship program was extended to agricultural issues as well. Nuffield was convinced that good agricultural practice also contributed to the maintenance of social well-being and that farmers should also travel around the world in order to enrich British farming practices with knowledge from distant countries.

Today, the Nuffield Farming Scholarship Program includes a global network of innovative farmers and agri-entrepreneurs. The focus is still on the good (best) professional practice of agricultural production in their own farms, as well as promoting the local and global pioneering spirit among farmers, strengthened by personality and competence development during the scholarship. After leaving German ground, I had almost 27 hours to finally devote myself in detail to the "program booklet" for Contemporary Scholars Conference (CSC) and I began to feel what Nuffield stands for.

Suddenly the smell of warm rain on asphalt hit me. I had landed on the East Coast of Australia - in Brisbane. When I arrived at the airport hotel, the first Nuffield fellows greeted me at the hotel bar - my first long night of agriculture in Australia had begun.

Farmers conduct research

Barely 24 hours later I was back at a bar. Now, however, in the company of far more farmers and with a beer brewed especially for the event. I listened eagerly to the short, but well-chosen words by the Chief Executive Officer of Nuffield Australia at the official start of this year's CSC. A short time later I found myself in very intensive discussions about everything and (agricultural) anything. What was particularly remarkable this evening to me was how quickly a bunch of farmers turned into a large group of very familiar, experienced conversation partners.



At this point I have to mention another special feature of the event that came into play that evening. Traveling with like-minded farmers from all over the world is only half the battle for the Nuffield Scholarship. The lion's share is made up of personal research projects, on which the participants work significantly during the period of their scholarships. These projects are not just any topics plucked out of “thin air”, but the topics that affect the scholarship holders, their company, and their industry to the greatest possible extent. Pure practice, real life.

These personal research projects therefore also represent an application criterion for a Nuffield Scholarship as challenges for global agriculture that arise today - and potentially in the future. Nuffield Scholars are not only willing to go on a tour of discovery, they are primarily tackling a problem, just like the medical students in Lord Nuffield's time. And that works best with knowledge from an international network and by exchanging information with other people in foreign countries and cultures.

I exchanged views on topics ranging from operational risk management, mental illness among farmers, soil health in fruit growing, parasite infestation in cow droppings on extensive grassland areas, to new marketing strategies of primeval cereals and cattle from Australia in Indonesia.

Not even surprisingly, farmers, thousands of miles apart, face similar challenges, yet true to the adage of “when in Rome, do as the Romans do”, those challenges are managed with a wide variety of measures in different places.



Strong personalities for a strong farming industry

The professional exchange in such a network of thousands of passionate farmers from all over the world is an incredible asset. As complex and multifaceted, sometimes even contradictory as the world is, also is agriculture - the better it is, if you know people who understand what you are talking about and can also have a say about it.

We – human beings - are as multifaceted, sometimes as contradictory. Understanding people – and what drives them to do what they do is therefore at least as valuable as the agricultural-technical

knowledge exchange with each other. And that is what makes Nuffield so special. The combination of knowledge exchange on agricultural topics with personality building and humanity.

On the first morning of the conference, I sat around a table overlooking the Pacific Ocean and with me two Australians, a British woman, a Brazilian, a Canadian and a Zimbabwean – again new faces that I had not met the night before. Although I had already read extensively in the program booklet during my journey, I now secretly asked myself the question: *“What will be here for the next few days?”* Getting out of the comfort zone and outside the box was clear, but *“how”* was still a mystery to me. Quite quickly it became apparent to me, that I was not alone in my thoughts on this.

The official kick-off to the conference was exciting, because each individual participant was randomly selected to come up to the stage for a short personal introduction and suddenly more than 200 eyes were on the performer. Even farmers having both feet on the ground told me in hindsight that they were shaking their knees up there alone on stage. In the end, my knees trembled as well as I made my way up to the stage while my name and a 2x3m photo of mine were on screen. Yet - the knee trembling had hardly been seen.



The program of the next few days was filled with workshops, sometimes in large groups, sometimes in small groups or even partner work. A full day, we devoted ourselves to the topic of personality formation - how we are and why we do things in certain ways, unlike our fellow human beings; how we are perceived by others and how the knowledge about this helps us to balance.

The so-called DISC personality profile provides a first good overview and information about the group structure as a basis in personality testing. The four letters represent the four basic human traits: dominance, influence, steadiness and conscientiousness, to which one assigns oneself on the basis of a test. The topic of personal leadership skills - what it takes to *“take”* people with them - took another day. Admittedly, there were a handful of participants at the first day already, who immediately caught my eye, and others, where I wondered in hindsight whether they belonged to the Nuffield group or not. Stereotypically, my subconsciousness saved the ones that seemed of interest to me directly and simply blocked out those that were not interesting to me at first glance.

That is how we human beings behave day in, day out, no matter what type of personality we are. Our subconsciousness likes to link new things with the well-known. The point is – and I once again became aware of this at the CSC – that one should be aware of this typical human behaviour every once in a while, to also “see” people who at first glance seem of no interest.

With the DISC model in mind, I have to say at this point: Whether in family life, among staff, among friends or even in public relations, good self-knowledge and awareness of successful communication are the keys to strong bounds. Some of us, for example, are so passionate about agriculture they prefer to shout it out (this is the I-type). Still others communicate their passion for agriculture in small circles behind closed doors. Either way, both are perfectly legitimate and give agriculture a strong voice - and that is what matters!

Travel, travel. Farmers travel!

High-minded input paired with unbridled curiosity to get to know the stories of the Nuffield Scholars, good food and drinks – I must say the official and unofficial part of the CSC usually blended into each other deep into the nights.

And then COVID-19 put a big spoke in our wheel and the whole conference was terminated on day five of the seven-day event. So highly focused on the workshops and getting to know each other, hardly anyone had followed the news. Pictures of empty streets in the worlds’ metropolises and the imposed lockdowns hit us out of nowhere. Less than six hours later I found myself sitting around a coffee table in the empty Brisbane Airport International Terminal with a number of Nuffield fellows.

I had never seen an empty airport in my life before and nearly imagined walking dead coming around the corners soon. However, my flight was not supposed to leave until a week later, according to the schedule. All other flights were already fully booked by then. So, what to do? The nice gentleman behind the airline counter encouraged me that air traffic would definitely remain stable for a few more weeks, as many people all over the world would have to get home now. So I decided to stay.

The next morning, back at the airport hotel, I met a couple of other Nuffielders standing for breakfast – and one of them was Andrew Todd, a cropping farmer from Western Australia (WA). Andrew didn't want to fly back to the WA but rather see some of the countryside. During the night I had the same idea. A short time later, Andrew and I sat together in a camper van heading south-west to Billy Browning’s property, another Nuffielder and cotton farmer. From there we went on to Richard Quigley, who also grows cotton, and to Jarrod Amery and his sheep and cropping farm.



Andrew and I managed to reach out to three other Nuffield Scholars in just 3 days and covered just over 2,000km. Quoting some of the other Nuffielders at this point here:

“You really live the Nuffield spirit! You make the most of it! Wow!”

One great thing about COVID in this case was, that Andrew and I were in the cabin of a camper van for many hours and I cannot remember such an intensive exchange on agricultural issues before in my life. Honest, reflective and blunt, functional, robust – talking agriculture! And on top of that: the great feeling of road tripping Australia while listening to some decent music.

In the end, whether the Nuffield program is on schedule or true to the motto: **‘The plan starts without a plan – Nuffield Farming is an adventure!’** It is a lifelong adventure together with farmers, who engage in this adventure, share and reflect on their perspectives, see challenges as opportunities and who are willing to help shape agriculture now and tomorrow! In my eyes these farmers are my role models and should also be role models of the whole farming industry!

Thank you

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to Stefan, Roland and the Horsch family. It is your pioneering spirit and your adventurous spirit that opens the door to new things for numerous farmers. Just like me and for that I am incredibly grateful to you. Jonah Leher once said: We travel – because we have to! Because distance and differences are the secret ingredients of creativity.

Back home, we realise that home is still home, but something about my mindset has changed. And that changes everything. And Nuffield 2020 has also changed my mindset on a lot of things.