



GARDINER FOUNDATION



MEDIA RELEASE

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Victoria's best dairy apprentices complete study tour of New Zealand

Four Victorian dairy apprentices have just completed the UDV/Gardiner Foundation Apprentice Tour to New Zealand 2009, describing the opportunity to compare and contrast New Zealand and Australian dairy farming as a big learning experience.

The four dairy apprentices are Julian Coburn from Timboon, Michelle Edgar from Yannathan, Paul Howe from Mepunga and Karlee Jones from Mepunga East. The tour was led by Gippsland dairy farmer and UDV Central Councillor Ron Paynter, and included Heidi Knowles from the National Centre for Dairy Education Australia (NCDEA) and Megan Dyer, Innovation Manager from the Gardiner Foundation.

The tour was hosted by Frank Brenmuhl on behalf of the Federated Farmers of New Zealand and included visits to dairy farms and factories as well as Lincoln University Demonstration Dairy Farm.

Paul Ford, CEO of the Gardiner Foundation, said that its funding support of this program reflects the Foundation's commitment through its Community and People Development Program, to enhance the capability of the young people who will drive the dairy industry in the future.

He said "the opportunity for the dairy apprentices to experience dairy systems in NZ, the world's largest dairy exporter and contrast them with their own experience at home is an invaluable part of their continuous development in the industry".

Each year UDV selects the best dairy apprentices to participate in the 10-day study tour of the NZ dairy industry. The tour recognizes the excellence of students who have successfully completed the dairy certificate 3 and 4 and provides them with the opportunity to gain a better understanding of how New Zealand, the world's largest dairy exporter, operates, as well as strengthening linkages between the two countries.

Julian Coburn, winner of the Dairy Apprentice of the Year 2009, said that he had learned a lot through his participation in the NZ tour. He said it had changed his view of farming and confirmed for him that increasing grass feeding and lowering the intake of other feeds makes more money in the end.

All participants felt that the Tour opened their eyes to a range of different ways to do things, many of which they could incorporate into their activities in Australia, and helped their communication skills through meeting people from all farming backgrounds.

A strong emphasis throughout the tour was on increasing the business skills of farmers – bringing together financial systems, labour units, amount of dry feed and all the key benchmarks in how to drive a dairy business, and the need for continuous improvement. A recurring message from host farmers was the need to find ways to increase profitability and to always focus on the bottom line.

Ron Paynter enjoyed the opportunity to lead the tour and described it as a "significant learning event" for him too. He said that "The Tour provided a stunning learning experience for young people early in their careers, and had fast-tracked their thinking and supercharged them with ideas for the future."

Ron said that "It helped me to get my head around the difference between NZ and Australian dairy systems and gave me a greater understanding of some of the issues faced by farmers in the two systems". He said that despite talk of land values decreasing and the impact on equity, the NZ farmers accepted changing market conditions and are "just getting on with the job."

Heidi Knowles, NCDEA, conducted a training module developed to provide the training component of the NZ tour which will be formally accredited as a unit in the Diploma of Agriculture (specializing in dairy). The training module provided a framework for the tour, supported apprentices in writing reports on farms they visited, and shaped the outcomes sought by UDV and Gardiner Foundation from the Tour.

Heidi said the tour was an excellent learning and networking experience for the apprentices. She said "I was really impressed by their passion for their industry and I believe the relationships between them will continue long into the future". Special interests for each of the apprentices were around calf rearing (Michelle), dairy support networks (Karlee), dairy business management systems (Julian) and grazing management (Paul).

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