

**Nuffield Contemporary Scholars Conference**  
**WashingtonDC & Pennsylvania**  
**6th-14th March 2010**

Being selected as Nuffield Scholars for New Zealand we were told that we would be in for an amazing year. The Contemporary Scholars Conference has more than lived up to these comments. Preparing a brief report will never cover the range and level of learning experience the three NZ Scholars have been immersed in! The fifty three international scholars introduced themselves and their topic of study as an opening to the conference. This showed the diversity of farming systems and the range of important issues going forward.

In Washington we got an overview of the USA agricultural industry. From broad acre crops, livestock farming, vegetable production to specialist tree crops - agriculture provides food at a price that enables the living standards of American people. The large majority of these are family farming businesses.

The conflict between farm and environment came in the traditional manner. In this case Prof. John Ikerd had strong views on his ideas of sustainable agriculture. In the other corner was the American Farm Bureau with equally strong views from the different side. They both had some good messages but by agreeing to disagree means they are largely lost.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania will be an experience all scholars will remember for a lifetime. The hospitality from the Department of Agriculture was notable for the amount of effort and time they devoted to this conference. Being able to engage with the Secretary (Hon. Russell Reading) and his colleagues over the course of five long days was (1) testament to the importance relationships hold in the American culture and (2) foreign to the Nuffield Scholars experience in their own countries. This led to the Secretary gaining the prestigious title of "A Good Bloke" from the Australians.

Leadership on the battlefields of Gettysburg in 1863 during the Civil War had everyone inspired. The prevailing message from our tour of these battle sites was "Adapt, Innovate and Overcome". The Generals from the Union and Confederate forces had to make clear and concise decisions at the right time. They did not have the communication technology of today to change decisions at will. Many men entrusted in their leadership.

A group of farmers naturally want to get some exposure to grass root farmers and growers. Mr Dick Waybright from Mason Dickson Farms is a "Farmer for the World" (the title of his biography). This man is ahead of his time and at 80 years strong has not stopped. When the likes of John Deere and Claas come to get ideas from a man, you know he is a man to listen to. From using bio digesters to make electricity dating back to the 1970's to having a

shed with more robot milking plants than the whole of NZ was a site to see. Then he made the comment that it was obsolete the day he finished it. That is the type of comment you can make when you spend ten percent of Gross Farm Income on research and development, borrow \$US3 million and pay it off during the year and plan the next shed that will be bigger, better, faster than the last. Yes, there may be animal welfare perceptions from housing cows all year round. You cannot ignore production of 850kg of milk solids per cow per year or rearing 2,400 calves and only losing four!

Sam and Susie Riehl were great hosts at another dairy farm. The opportunity to visit a working Amish farm and interact with a very different culture from our own is invaluable. Sam answered all questions, what is more he really challenged the group in the way he related the answers to our own culture. People are people, our similarities make us comfortable with each other and our differences make interested in one another. As Sam put it, he chose to live his life by the Amish rules. The innovation he has put into practice shows he has adapted his systems well.

From the farming visits of the New Holland factory in the town of New Holland, the Young Growers Alliance, Rice Fruit company, mushroom and composting operation to the hospitality of the Canadian Embassy, The Governor Residence, Hauser Estate Winery and the Penn National Race Course. We were treated to a awesome experience. This is a credit to all the people involved in the organisation of this conference as well as all the people in America that showed how hospitality and rapport with people are important qualities to aspire to in our daily lives.

Hopefully this report has given the you as the reader an insight of what the three 2010 NZ Nuffield Scholars and the Chairman have gained from this experience of a lifetime. To think this is was only the start of the year ahead really shows the important role of the Nuffield Scholarship. To hear some of the other special activities that were packed into this well organised conference ask Desiree Reid, Ian Knowles, Paul McGill or Stuart Wright when you next see them. They will be keen to share their accounts with you.