



**A Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust
Report**

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**The Young Nuffield
(Bob Matson) Award**

**Agricultural societies and
shows: where do we go
from here?**

Aled Rhys Jones

July 2016

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A Nuffield (UK) Farming Scholarships Trust Report



Date of report:	July 2016	<i>“Leading positive change in agriculture. Inspiring passion and potential in people.”</i>
Title	Agricultural societies and shows: where do we go from here?	
Scholar	Aled Rhys Jones	
Sponsor	The Young Nuffield (Bob Matson) Award	
Objectives of Study Tour	<ol style="list-style-type: none">(1) To understand the historical context of agricultural societies and shows and compare their relevance to modern farming;(2) To establish the principal functions and charitable aims of agricultural societies and shows and understand how these aims are delivered;(3) To explore the relationship between ‘the society’ and ‘the show’;(4) To highlight the challenges and opportunities for societies and shows to remain relevant, viable and sustainable in an increasingly diverse agricultural industry.	
Countries Visited	Belgium, China, England, France, Northern Ireland, Papua New Guinea, Scotland, United States of America, Wales	
Messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agricultural societies and shows play an important role in promoting farming and food production to the wider public• Sound financial management and business planning is key to secure the long-term sustainability of societies and shows• Strategic planning and proper governance structures is fundamental to the effective delivery of charitable aims• A society is more than just a show – and people need to know about it• Clarity of purpose and regular communication is required• Greater focus and resources will be placed on delivering education to both children and the consumer• Technology, data analytics and digital marketing will play an important role in the way societies and shows conduct their business in future• People are one of our most important resources and societies and shows need to invest to grow future leaders	

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DISCLAIMER

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1. Personal Introduction

I was born and raised on the family's 700-acre hill farm at Cwrt-y-Cadno, north Carmarthenshire. The farm has been in the family for over a century with my father being the third generation to manage the farming business. Situated on the southern edge of the Cambrian Mountains, the farm carries a flock of 1,100 early lambing ewes and a small herd of commercial beef cattle.

Whilst I have always had a keen interest in farming, I was encouraged by my parents to seek a profession and gain experience in working away from the farm. Therefore, after completing my secondary education, I went to the University of Reading to study Land Management. After graduating with a first class honours degree in 2007, I was offered a position in a surveying practice where I undertook my professional examinations. Some two years later I qualified as a Chartered Surveyor and passed the entrance exams to become a Fellow of the Central Association of Agricultural Valuers. I then spent six years as a rural practice surveyor before I was appointed to my current role of Assistant Chief Executive at the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society (RWAS).



Figure 1: The author, Aled Rhys Jones

From a young age, I have been actively involved in the Young Farmers Club movement, being a past member and chairman of Dyffryn Cothi YFC. Having competed at all levels in debating, acting, stock judging and travelled widely, I am indebted to the YFC for providing me with the essential life skills which have proved extremely valuable in both my personal development and professional career. During my 15 years as a member, I have enjoyed many highlights within the YFC culminating in being named Senior Member of the Year for England and Wales in 2012. The confidence gained from these experiences has enabled me to take advantage of many opportunities including being a regular after dinner speaker and more recently having been chosen to take part in the annual debate at the Oxford Union during the 2016 Oxford Farming Conference.

I was also brought up by my parents and grandparents to be a keen supporter of agricultural shows and, for as long as I can remember, I would embark on the annual pilgrimage to the Royal Welsh Show. Along with many other farming families, the Show would be one of the highlights of our year and it has become a national institution much loved throughout Wales and beyond. Therefore, my appointment as Assistant Chief Executive in 2013 was a proud moment for both me and my family.

Despite the constant leg-pulling from my friends saying that I only work four days per year, the role is far broader and more varied than most people think. Working for a charity with a 21,000 strong membership and annual turnover of almost £6 million not only offers variety but is hugely



rewarding. My principal responsibilities lie with the tactical operation of the RWAS through overseeing the livestock, trade stands and sponsorship departments for all three of our major events, namely the Spring Festival, Summer Show and Winter Fair. Also, utilising my professional qualifications as a Chartered Surveyor, I am responsible for our portfolio of assets including up to 40 showground leases and licences together with the insurances and compliance. In addition to these day to day duties, I represent the RWAS on various stakeholder groups and actively engage with our 14 county advisory committees which are considered the key pillars of our success.

Prior to my appointment, I served on the Carmarthenshire county advisory committee and was elected the very first Chairman of the recently launched RWAS Young Members' Forum. It was established to encourage more youth involvement in the RWAS with a view of securing the long term sustainability of the Society.

My employment and background inspired me to apply for a Nuffield Farming Scholarship to explore the future role of agricultural societies and shows. With agriculture facing a significant period of change at the moment with global commodity market volatility becoming the norm, agricultural societies face a challenge to evolve in pace with the industry whilst remaining relevant to an increasingly diverse audience.

Where do we go from here was the key question I set out to answer.



2. Background and objectives of my study

Agricultural societies and shows have played a leading role in the development of agriculture and the rural economy since the middle 18th century. Originally established to promote best practice in the breeding of livestock and crop production through the application of science, equipment and mechanisation, today their role covers a far greater spectrum of farming and rural life. This shift in focus has resulted in shows providing a means of communication between farmers and the consumer; educating a growing urban audience; providing support for rural trade and businesses together with playing an important part in the social and cultural calendar.

According to the Association of Show and Agricultural Organisations (ASAO), almost seven million people attended U.K. shows last year, which is up from five million some 10 years ago. Despite the increase in attendance, this figure only represents approximately 10% of the UK's population, whilst countries such as Australia and the U.S.A. reach out to an audience of approximately 20% or more of their population.

Very little research exists on the broader role of agricultural shows in modern society and whilst the charitable aims of most agricultural and show societies are, to the most part, still relevant today, the way in which these aims are fulfilled may need to change in future. Agricultural shows are no longer targeted at a purely farming audience and their success will rely in the way they communicate to visitors who are becoming increasingly detached from the land.

In addition, it is often misperceived that agricultural societies were formed with the sole function of holding a big annual show. Most societies were formed and ran successfully for over a century before shows started to appear. Whilst annual shows provide a fantastic platform to showcase the very best in the industry and serve as an important economic and social function, societies are member-led and/or charitable organisations which operate throughout the year. Many of them have diversified their income streams through making the most of their assets and facilities in order to remain financially secure. Indeed, the inability to make adequate surpluses is a major threat to some shows and we have seen over recent years the demise of one of our most iconic events – the Royal Show at Stoneleigh.

Therefore, with the agricultural, political and demographic landscape changed significantly since the time when shows were first introduced, societies and events will need to evolve in order to safeguard their future.

Consequently, my research has focussed on the following objectives:

- To understand the historical context of agricultural societies and shows and compare their relevance to modern farming
- To establish the principal functions and charitable aims of agricultural societies and shows and understand how these aims are delivered
- To explore the relationship between 'the society' and 'the show'
- To highlight the challenges and opportunities for societies and shows to remain relevant, viable and sustainable in an increasingly diverse agricultural industry.



3. Historical context – setting the scene

The history of agricultural societies and shows can boast some Welsh roots with the foundation of the Breconshire Agricultural Society in 1755, established by local squire Charles Powel of Castell Madoc, and being the first county society of its kind in Britain. Powel was influenced by the London Society of Arts which was set up the year before for the encouragement of agriculture, manufacturing and commerce (Howell, 2003). Several other county societies were established by the aristocracy and gentry during the late 18th century, each with the aim of improving animal and crop husbandry. Whilst the impact of some of the early agricultural societies may have been limited and fell short of expectation, they did assist with the introduction of new methods of husbandry with prizes awarded for the best produce.

It would take another 100 years or so before shows started to appear in numbers and, with the increase in livestock values during the 1850s and 1860s, some progressive farmers and landowners started to see the benefit of breed improvements in cattle and sheep. As quoted by Best, 2013, “*The Society came first. The Shows came later as a means to achieve the Society’s objectives*”.

The flurry of activity during the middle of the 18th century to form local and regional societies was soon followed by national ones. The Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland was originally founded in 1783, The Royal Agricultural Society of England was established in 1838, The Royal Ulster Agricultural Society was originally formed in 1854 and Wales was last of UK countries with the formation of the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society in 1904. It took a little bit longer for Wales to establish a national society which Howell (2003) partly attributes to the long-standing animosities between the inhabitants of south and north Wales.

Nevertheless, by the end of the 19th and early 20th century agricultural shows were, literally, on the road. Peripatetic shows were commonplace all across the U.K. during the late 19th century and it coincided with a drive to reach out to ordinary farmers, not just the landed gentry, to raise awareness of technological advances, crop husbandry and genetic improvement of livestock.

With growing staging costs, these travelling shows settled on more permanent showgrounds during the 1960s which saw the establishment of improved facilities and continued growth in their popularity. This period was also one of huge growth in agricultural output with the post-war focus on maximising food production. Undoubtedly, the role of shows to link farmers with the latest technology and innovations proved influential during this era of production-orientated agriculture.

Subsequent decades saw the introduction of the Common Agricultural Policy, various support mechanisms, then the de-coupling of support payments and, more recently, the dramatic decision for Britain to leave the European Union following the referendum of June 2016. The demands on farming are much different now compared with a century ago and likewise shows have had to innovate due to changing market conditions. Shows have introduced more displays of entertainment recognising its changing visitor profile and a need to keep the paying public attending.

How does the rich history, tradition and heritage of today’s shows translate to modern farming?
How do we remain relevant and where do shows fit in global agriculture?



4. Overview of countries visited

In an attempt to answer these questions, I organised an intense programme of international and domestic travel, which is captured by the infographic below showing some key statistics from my Farming Scholarship.



Figure 2: Infographic with key travel statistics



4.1. France

(February, 2015)

My Nuffield Farming journey began at the historic city of Reims in north-eastern France. A gathering of Scholars from all across the globe descended on the famous Champagne wine growing region for a cocktail of fun, learning and changing perceptions. In this annual gathering called the Contemporary Scholars Conference (CSC), a clever line up of speakers challenged us to think differently. The key themes of the week included the need to produce more from less, public perception of farmers, post GMO biotechnology, genomic selection, precision farming, big data, agroecology, consumer behaviour and communication. Each day built on the previous and made us reconsider our pre-conceived ideas or natural bias.

Never have I been quite so taken back by the sheer volume of information delivered together with the lively debates and in-depth questioning which followed each speaker.

The week provided the perfect backdrop to my Nuffield Farming study and set the context for agriculture - global agriculture that is. I don't think I had ever appreciated the diverse nature of our industry, but having spent time with my fellow Scholars from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Brazil, Mozambique (to name just a few) it really highlighted the many forms of farming that exist, from rearing livestock to growing mangos.

For me, the importance of connecting with the consumer and communicating effectively was reinforced. Public opinion is there to be informed and influenced, and we all have a duty to sell the story of modern and responsible farming. As one of our speakers said: *"premium price is not about the product, it's about the story"*.

This is something the French do exceptionally well; they are passionate about the food they produce and they sell their story. In the days leading up to the CSC, the Paris Show was held, the largest agricultural show in France. Attracting over 1,200 exhibitors, 4,000 animals and almost one million visitors, the Show is the measure of the popularity of French farmers in society. In the annual opinion poll, 91% of the French people consider agriculture essential for the future of their country. A statistic to be proud of!

The grand finale of the week was the final banquet at G.H. Mumm, the home of the Formula One podium champagne. In the breath-taking cellars carved into the chalk deep beneath the historic city of Reims, we were treated to an exceptional dinner with plenty of fizz.

All in all, a very memorable trip, not to mention the pre-CSC programme which started at the NFU Conference in Birmingham, a visit to the Houses of Parliament and intense workshops in London, tour of the European Parliament in Brussels and a leadership course played out on the battlefields of Waterloo. It was a perfect way to kick off what was going to be a busy and enjoyable year.

4.2. China

(March, 2015)

The growing affluence of Asia will have a major impact on global agriculture. In March 2015, I travelled to China, Hong Kong and Singapore on an intense two-week agribusiness tour and



witnessed it for myself. There are almost too many meetings and visits to mention in this report, but I must acknowledge the excellent work of Nuffield Australia in arranging meetings and access to both individuals and businesses which, ordinarily, would never be possible. I met farmers, growers, importers, wholesalers, industry experts, bankers, manufactures, processors, to name just a few, and was hosted by several government officials. An overview of my tour is included in Appendix A.

4.3. United States of America

(August, 2015)

My tour of the mid-west of America in August, 2015, was my single longest trip – it lasted four weeks. I visited a total of seven state fairs including Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana, Missouri, Kentucky, Iowa and Minnesota, three county fairs including Hartford and Holmes in Ohio and Benton in Arkansas, and received guided tours of seventeen fairgrounds.

The state fairs of the U.S. have similar origins to U.K. shows with their founding principles to promote agriculture. However, they have expanded significantly with changing demographics in America and now combine both competitive and recreational functions. Many fairs in the U.S. have added more entertainment and amusements in an effort to keep drawing and increasing the crowds. This is used as a vehicle to highlight and educate a predominantly non-farming audience on the importance of agriculture. Interestingly, fairs are probably geared more towards being entertainment attractions rather than technical farming events. This is something I intend to dig a little bit deeper into in order to get a better understanding of what is the right balance of content.

With fairs running over two weeks or more and attendance figures frequently above one million, their scale was staggering. Nevertheless, despite being on opposite sides of the North Atlantic, the matters we deal with are remarkably similar from biosecurity controls, public health, animal welfare, communicating with a non-farming audience about animal husbandry techniques, animal housing, stock litter to signage etc. I certainly took a huge amount of learning from their best practice and likewise shared some of the experiences of the Royal Welsh.

At each fair I visited, I was greeted by hugely enthusiastic organisers and volunteers who were all remarkably generous with their time and guided tours. Coupled with the time I spent with the staff team of the International Association of Fairs and Expositions (IAFE) and their invaluable support, I gained a much better understanding of the way fairs operate in the U.S., their governance structures, balance of content, youth competitions, entertainment offering and, above all, their commitment to education.

Many of my experiences and findings will be shared later in this report.

4.4. Papua New Guinea

(October, 2015)

In October, 2015, I set off on one of the most enlightening and culturally diverse visits of my Nuffield Farming study tour. Together with ten other next-generation delegates selected by the Royal



Agricultural Societies of the Commonwealth (RASC) we toured Papua New Guinea. We were hosted by two organisations, namely the National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI) and the Morobe Province Agricultural Society (MPAS).

My trip explored both the rugged terrain of the highlands and the hot and humid coastal region. Papua New Guinea is known for its cultural and linguistic diversity (with tribal communities and over 840 different languages), but it also has huge variation in land and farming. From subsistence farming in the highlands to large corporate enterprises in the coastal belt; from sweet potato growing to coffee; coco, citrus fruits, palm oil, pigs to crocodile farming: it was all there, and more.

The highlight, and main purpose of the trip, was the Morobe Province Show. Staged on the weekend closest to the full moon in the month of October each year, this is by far the most exciting annual event in the province and is held at Papua New Guinea's second largest city of Lae. The two-day event showcased stunning exhibitions on Papua New Guinea's culture, agriculture, horticulture, livestock, commercial businesses, schools and institutions. Most notably, Morobe is famous for its Sing-Sing groups with over 2,000 performers from 80 tribes performing their traditional dancing and songs.

In an explosion of colour and noise, these groups come from all over the country and many from remote highland communities. In complete contrast to the U.K., U.S.A. and China, where urbanisation has occurred, only 18% of the population live in towns and cities. The majority lives in rural areas with little access to basic services and facilities. Exploring the role of shows in a developing country therefore adds a different dynamic to my study. Despite being a country rich in natural resources, they have challenges. During my visit, I saw the impact of the recent drought on the country and, believe it or not, the impact of severe frost on crops in the highlands. The weather is a challenge we all have to contend with, in particular the organisers of large outdoor events.

4.5. United Kingdom

(2015 and 2016)

There is a lot I can learn in the U.K. In between my many international excursions, I wanted to fit in as many show visits and interviews in the U.K. as possible. With the state fairs of the U.S. and shows of Australia based on the British model, it is important to understand our origins. Likewise, I was keen to explore how my findings could translate here with a view of setting out a future roadmap for societies and shows. I therefore visited shows in Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland and I would like to acknowledge the support of the Association of Show and Agricultural Organisations (ASAO) and its members for being so welcoming and supportive of my studies.

4.6. Other Countries

(2015 and 2016)

In addition to my visits, I consulted with several other agricultural societies and show organisers from Canada and Australia through emails, social media and skype calls.



5. My findings

5.1. Today's agriculture – a global business

21st century agriculture is a global business. Demand for food is predicted to grow with the much-talked-about increase in global population, predicted to reach nine billion by 2050. The population net gain is said to be 158 people per minute. That would equate to my home town of Llandeilo filling up in less than 16 minutes!

The majority of this growth will occur in Africa and Asia with the rest of the world experiencing only limited growth with Europe remaining static. From a supply perspective, pressures on land, water and energy will make production more challenging. For farmers, however, one of their biggest challenges is to secure stability in commodity prices. With most commodities traded globally, marketplaces are now more prone to economic downturns, political conflicts, disease outbreaks, natural disasters and extreme weather events than ever before. This has led to significant volatility in prices making agricultural business planning increasingly difficult, and further pressure to reduce input costs and improve production efficiency.

In an unfortunate set of circumstances, all agricultural sectors in the U.K. and commodity groups have experienced a downturn in prices over the past 18 months. This is not unique to agriculture as most other major commodities such as oil and other raw materials have experienced similar market volatility. Economic commentators attribute much of this to the 'Chinese slowdown'. It is true that the rate of growth of the Chinese economy has fallen from the previous annual levels of 10% to a reported growth of 6.9% but it is still outperforming most other countries. In 2014 the global economy grew by 2.6%, with China accounting for 47% of that growth. This highlights how important and influential Asia's economy is to global commodity markets including food. As Dr David Hughes, Professor of Food Marketing, tweeted in 2014 "*What if China stops growing? Aaaaagh!*".

Despite this economic 'speed wobble' in China, they have a growing middle class and anticipated rise in demand for meat. According to data released by Rabobank International, 70% of global growth in demand for meat will be in Asia, with no other country or continent coming close. How will this demand be satisfied? Most industry commentators, including Dr David Hughes mentioned above, believe that chicken and fish will be the predominant protein to capture this market share. Both chicken and fish are fiercely competitive on price, particularly when compared to red meat which sits at the premium end of the market.

Therefore, with commodity price volatility predicted to stay, combined with fierce global competition in food production, and U.K. farming entering the post-Brexit era, securing a strong domestic market for our produce has never been more important. With highly unpredictable export markets prone to so many economic and political variables, the best market for U.K. premium products will be at home. In fact, the U.K. is one of the very few European countries with its population predicted to rise, from 65 million to 74 million by 2035.

Furthermore, consumer trends and demands are changing. There is a rise in interest in food provenance on the back of food scandals and scepticism about large corporations and some modern science. Demonstrating traceability and transparency in the food supply chain can build trust with consumers – a key to unlocking this market opportunity. Consequently, agricultural shows will have



an incredibly important part to play in selling the story of food and farming to today's consumer and visitor.

5.2. Today's visitor – not just farmers

The visitor profile of the very first agricultural shows would have been dominated by landowners and farmers. Today's visitors are far more diverse. In a visitor survey conducted by the Royal Welsh Show in 2015, two-thirds of visitors (66%) self-identified themselves as having an agricultural background, which is significantly higher than those who reported as actually working in agriculture (41%).

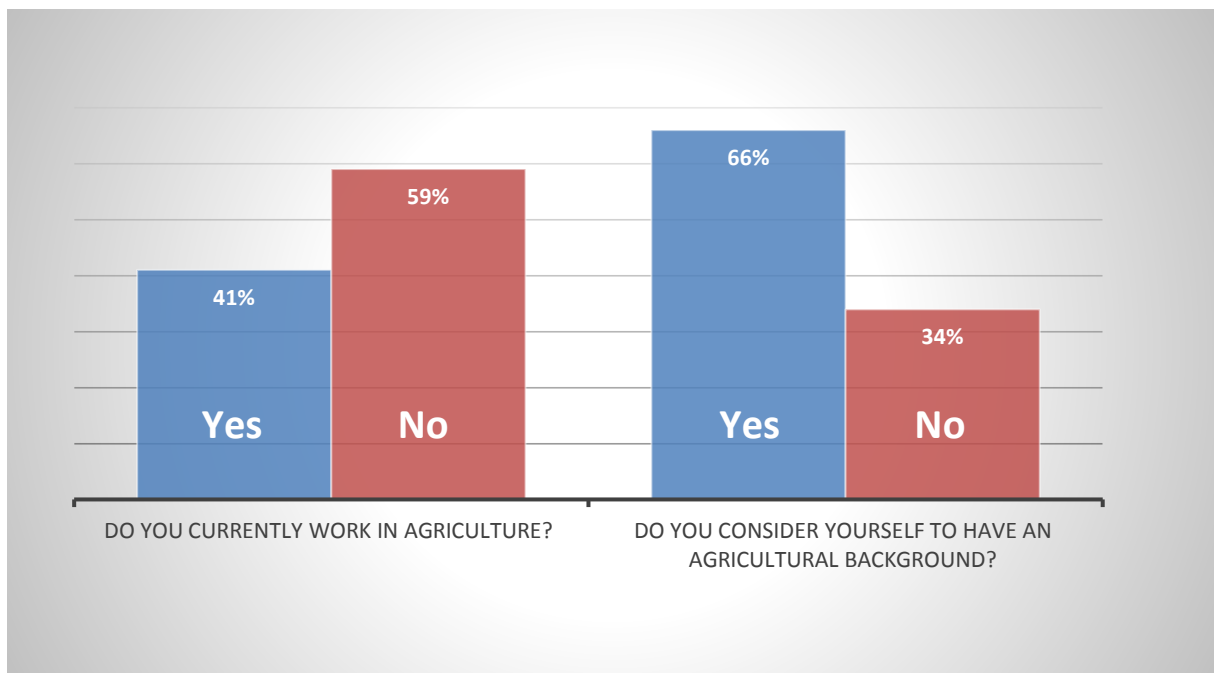


Figure 3: Royal Welsh Show 2015 visitor survey – respondents' involvement in agriculture

These results indicate that the majority of visitors do not work directly in agriculture and a third do not even come from agricultural backgrounds. The audience of the Royal Welsh Show, as indeed many others, extends beyond the farming sector itself. With the trend of falling direct employment in agriculture, the role of shows in preserving the rural identity to those who are not involved in the sector becomes ever more important.

In the same survey, visitors were asked to rate their experience and identify which aspects had motivated them to attend. The top reasons for attending were 'eating and drinking local produce' and 'an interest in country life', closely followed by 'to socialise' and 'to see livestock'. When asked to rate their experiences of these aspects, all four had an overall score of 4.5 out of 5, which highlights the close relationship between motivation and experience. Other reasons for attending which, traditionally, would have been expected to feature in the top four were: 'to keep in touch with the wider agricultural industry or for networking', 'to see the machinery', 'to meet suppliers



and/or dealers', and 'to do business'. This is further indication that the demographic of visitors is changing.

Visitors were also asked to state the single thing they most liked about the show. The word cloud below shows 50 of the most common responses and the larger the typeface, the greater number of times the word was given as the answer. Again, it reinforces the most popular attractions are livestock and animals, food and drink and socialising.

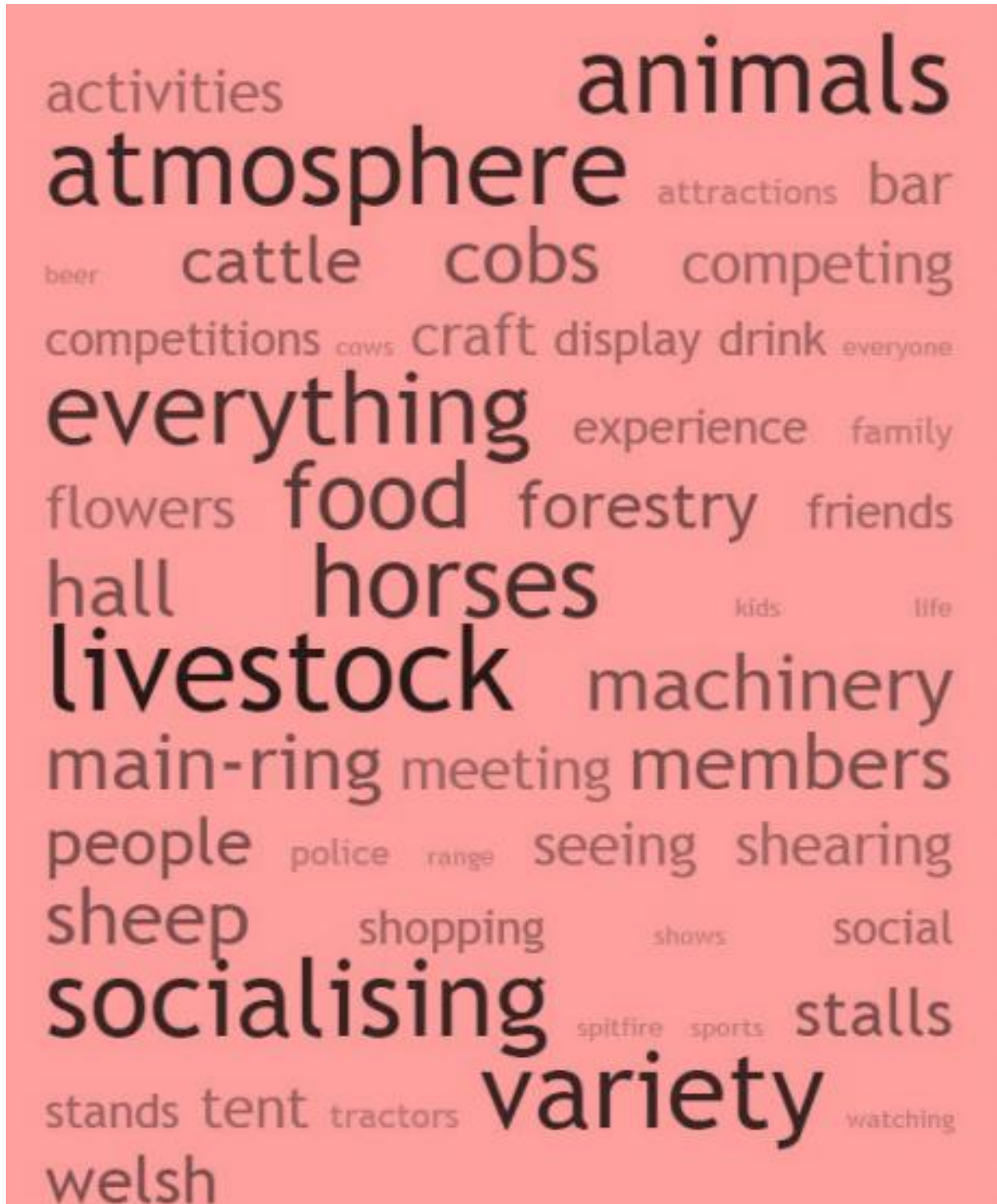


Figure 4: Visualisation of the top responses to the question 'what is the single thing you've liked most about the show?' from the 2015 Royal Welsh Show visitor survey



These results are not unique to the U.K. From my research with Australian counterparts, the Royal Agricultural Society of New South Wales conducts exit surveys annually at the Sydney Royal Easter Show. In response to why visitors attended, the top unprompted answers included ‘for the animals’ (51%) and ‘for the food’ (38%). Again, similar observations to the U.K. and other ‘prompted’ responses included ‘education experience for the children’, highlighting the show to be a family day out.

These findings were also true for the American and Canadian fairs. In a comprehensive report commissioned by the International Association of Fairs and Expositions (IAFE) in 2014 which collated visitor surveys from 13 fairs across the U.S. and Canada, 74.2% of respondents listed the ability to spend time with the family as one of the most important factors influencing fair attendance. Figure 5 below shows the percentage of respondents who rated the top five reasons for attending as either important or very important. In close second to family time, food and agriculture feature strongly with 65.6% and 62.4% of respondents respectively.

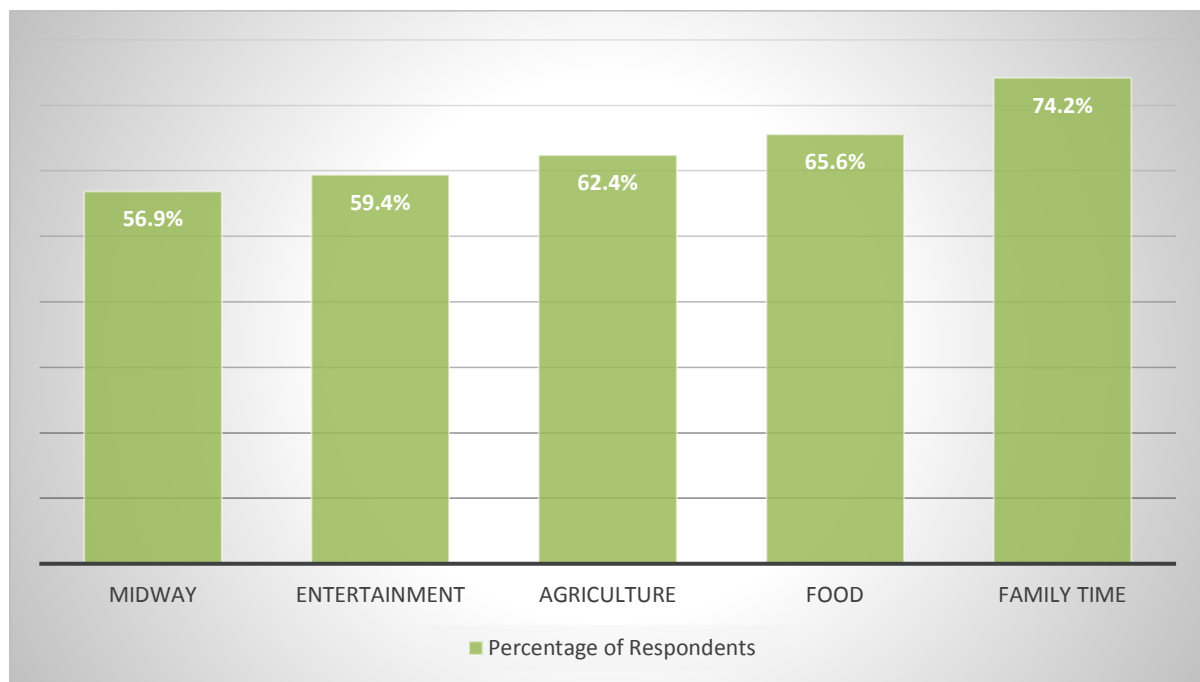


Figure 5: Factors importance to fair attendance. (Source: Lillywhite, Dr. J.M., 2014)

Shows will inevitably be expressions of society at a point in time, and the communities which they serve. Whilst it is clear that shows appeal to traditional farming communities, there is a growing diversity among visitors. It is reassuring that traditional entertainment in the form of competitive livestock displays ranks highly as one of the most important attractions, reinforcing that the agricultural core of events remains central to their identity. However, visitor types and preferences are changing and the future viability of shows will depend on the ability of societies to pro-actively adapt to these emerging trends.



5.3. Shifting the focus of shows

The future of shows has been the subject of some concern. With ever increasing cost pressures and changes in the agricultural industry, questions have been raised over their viability and relevance. The purpose of shows has therefore changed over time. This has led to a change of emphasis within many agricultural societies and greater focus on education as a means of delivering their charitable aims.

As Goddard (1988) records in the historical account of the Royal Agricultural Society of England (RASE), a 1973 conference set a new agenda and direction for the Royal Show, stating that “*the RASE had an important role in the interpretation of agriculture to the general public and that it should pay particular attention to urban-rural relationships and care for the countryside*”. Despite the early foresight and change of direction, it is well-documented that the Royal Show failed in its endeavours. The reasons for this and the RASE’s new focus will be discussed later in section 5.12.

Nevertheless, engaging an urban audience has emerged as one of the principal functions of shows, as opportunities for encounters between farmers and the general public are few and far between. Consumer interest in food and farming has increased tremendously in recent years, but shows need to be aware of the challenges of remaining credible and authentic to the public with the risks of declining agricultural content. Farmer interest in the event must be maintained for the show to present a true picture of farming. This is a key element in inspiring confidence and trust in the consumer.

Shows are not just about bringing the public to the farmers, they are also about bringing farmers to the public. Traditionally, farmers have not been very good at communicating with the consumer. Farmers need to understand their role in the entire food supply chain and not just in production. Shows provide a rare opportunity to connect directly with the public and their role in portraying positive images of agriculture is extremely important.

Despite the significance of shows to re-connect with a growing urban public, the decline in agricultural content presents a very real threat to the authenticity of events. Several show managers across the U.K. have commented that many agricultural suppliers, manufacturers and stand holders are questioning their presence at shows. With proportionately fewer farmers attending and significant stand costs including transport of large machinery, staffing and providing hospitality etc., it is becoming increasingly difficult for them to justify the expenditure.

This was very noticeable in my tour of the state fairs of the U.S. Agricultural content in the form of farm machinery and implements was very limited and, during a discussion with one of the board members of the Minnesota State Fair, he informed me that historically the fair had an 80-acre Machinery Hill. The Machinery Hill at the Minnesota State Fair was famous for its “huge displays of the latest and greatest in farm equipment” (Weinfurter, T., 2015). According to an article in the IAFE’s publication Fairs & Expos entitled ‘The Power of the Past’, “*as the cost of hauling equipment to the fairgrounds and staffing the displays increased, dealers had to scale back their displays*”. This resulted in fairs having to find alternative content for the spaces left behind. In the case of Minnesota this has been partly replaced by ‘The Old Iron Show’, a display of vintage machinery to evoke a feeling of nostalgia and memories of the past.



This trend of less farm equipment at shows is no doubt connected with the rise in popularity of specialist, technical events such as Cereals, Grassland and Muck. Targeted specifically at agricultural customers with working demonstrations, these events are deemed to offer better return on investment to manufacturers compared to traditional shows.

Case Study

Farm Progress Show, Illinois, United States of America

In August 2015, I visited the site of the Farm Progress Show in Decatur, Illinois, and met the National Shows Manager, Matt Jungmann. The Farm Progress Show is the largest outdoor technical event of its kind in the USA. Staged over three days, it attracts an estimated attendance of 150,000, of which 98% are farm owners/occupiers and decision makers. Located in the famous corn belt of America, it boasts over 500 exhibitors on a show site extending to 640 acres of exhibits and field demonstrations. Organised by the *Prairie Farmer* magazine, it showcases the very latest in farm equipment, seed varieties and agricultural chemicals.

This was strictly a trade event with no arts or crafts. Entirely devoted to the needs of the busy modern American farmer, most attendees only visited for one day and Matt Jungmann described the event as the “Detroit Auto Show of farming”. The likes of John Deere, Case International and others would produce hugely impressive stands with elaborate theatre set-ups and multimedia displays to launch their new and most exciting pieces of kit.



Figure 6: The Farm Progress Show 2015 (Decatur, Illinois, U.S.A.)

Ironically, many of these technical events in the U.K. have been established by agricultural societies to fulfil their charitable aims, yet it has contributed towards to the reduction of specialist farm equipment on display at shows. Some view this with a potential to jeopardise the strategic objective to re-connect with a non-farming audience. Nevertheless, there has been a simultaneous rise in other content including diversification-related business, countryside conservation, renewable energy technologies and recreation etc., demonstrating the general shift in the industry.

Whilst the U.S. state fairs openly recognise that they are facing a decrease in participation of farm machinery/equipment business as their audience becomes more urban, the Chief Executive Officer and President of the IAFE, Marla Calico, believes this reinforces “*the importance of agricultural education for the urban fairgoer as a key to sustainability of the fair and its mission*”. Rather than



being a threat, she believes this is an opportunity for fairgrounds to host and even organise their own sector-specific events that support their aims and objectives. Numerous examples already exist including the Ozark Fall Farmfest in Missouri, the Big Iron Show in North Dakota, the Beef Expo organised by the Wisconsin State Fair, the Western Hog Show organised by the Erie County Fair in New York and many others.

Therefore, there is a clear divergence between technical events aimed at traditional farming audience and large agricultural shows which appeal to a broader and increasing non-farming audience. This represents a shift in focus of shows and Holloway (2004) concludes in his paper by suggesting *“that the sense in which agricultural societies fulfil their stated charitable objective of ‘promoting’ agriculture has thus partly shifted from furthering agricultural ‘progress’, towards acting as public relations agencies for farming”*.

Public understanding of agriculture will become more centre-stage for societies in an attempt to inform and influence consumer behaviour. This is a new way of delivering charitable aims, and achieving effective public relations is all about telling the story. As Jean-Pierre Beaudoin, Associate Professor at Paris Sorbonne University School for Communication, told Nuffield Farming Scholars at the CSC Conference – the first story is always considered to be the truth, whereas the second story will always be considered as a reaction to the truth. The message was simple – get in early and tell your story first!

The best way to communicate is to show and not tell. For livestock farmers, this is done through the competitive displays of animals. But with agriculture changing, and the visitor profile at events changing, is showing animals still relevant?

5.4. Is showing animals still relevant?

Competitive exhibitions of livestock began as a means to promote breed improvement. The move from animals roaming communally in open fields to closed flocks and herds, paved the way for improved management, husbandry and breeding. Farmers would pitch their best animals in return for prizes. Animals would be judged against their breed standard with a view to improving agricultural productivity and output.

The breed standard farmers would aspire to would be driven by the trends and fashions of the time. The demands of the modern consumer are considerably different to the market trends which influenced the breeding of animals in the late 18th and early 19th century. In Clive Aslet’s account of the history of agricultural societies and shows, he refers to an *“exhibition of the loin of a prize three-year-old wether of 1799 on which the fat measured seven inches”*. He offers an explanation that this practice *“must lie in the contemporary preoccupation with feeding and fattening to produce the obese beasts – ‘too dear to buy and too fat to eat’ – shown in paintings of the period”*. Big was beautiful and an excellent example of this is the painting of ‘Trojan’, a Hereford Bull representative of the breed type in 1826.

See picture on next page



Figure 7: 'Trojan' painted by Thomas Weaver in 1826

According to Aslet, the Royal Smithfield Club was also famous for its oversized animals and their Christmas show held in London each December was criticised for the production of '*mere fat, unwieldy, imbecile brutes*'. This is a world away from the demands of the modern health conscious consumer. Consequently, the breeding of commercial animals has shifted its focus to produce leaner meat better suited to the nutritional needs, preferred cooking methods and convenience of the consumer.

Whilst you will not see many animals like 'Trojan' at modern shows, as their breeding has evolved, shows have still been criticised for becoming increasingly detached from modern agriculture. It is argued that show animals are not an accurate reflection of commercial livestock. Despite the changes in breeding techniques, the practice of feeding to produce large, muscular and highly manicured animals remains a strong feature at shows. Showing has also become a profession in itself with some non-farming exhibitors having nucleus flocks, herds and studs of show animals as a hobby or pastime.

Following the British Cattle Breeders Conference in January 2015 where Australian beef farmer Tom Gubbins told UK farmers to "ditch livestock showing" and embrace EBVs (Estimated Breeding Values) if they want to survive, the Farmers Weekly ran an article entitled 'Is cattle showing holding back genetic progress?' In an online poll, 55.02% of the respondents answered yes, as shown in Figure 8 on next page.

See graphic overleaf

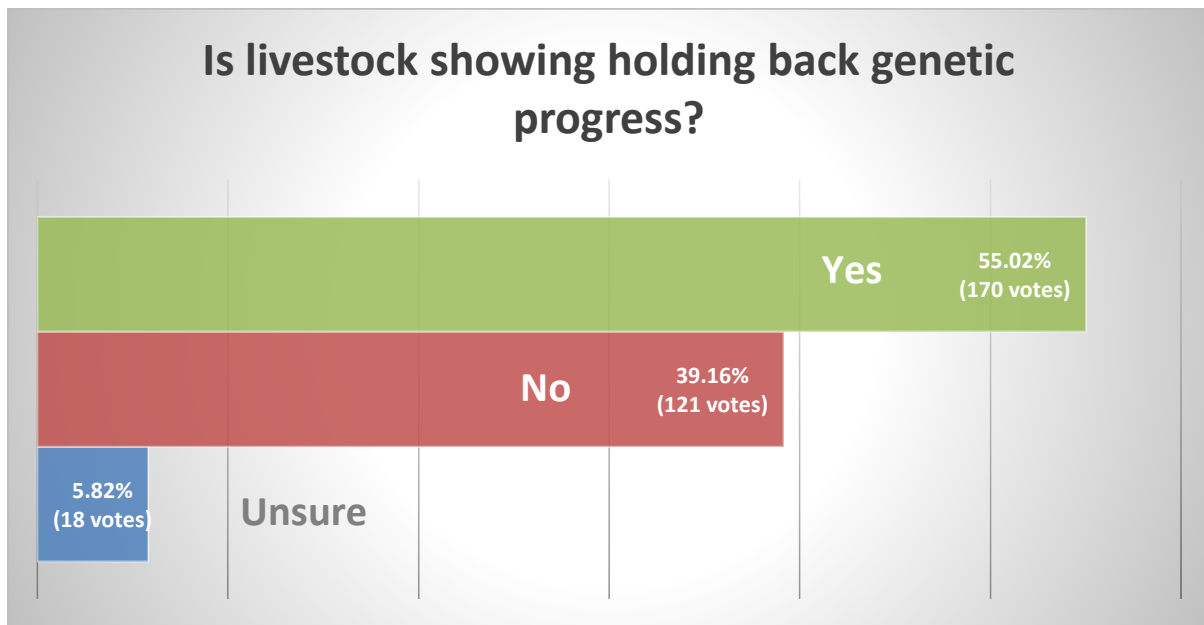


Figure 8: Results on online poll run by Farmers Weekly (Source: Price, R., 2015)

The article interviewed several farmers from across the U.K. and James Evans, a beef farmer from Shropshire, said *“showing has got no relevance in modern-day beef production. It is fine if people want to do it as a hobby. But it hasn’t got any commercial effect on my business. Animals that are shown are not fit for the British cattle industry any more. At the moment there’s two tiers within the breed. The cows you show and the cows that commercially make money – they are not the same animal. Those traits in show cattle are not the traits proven for profitable beef production”*.

William Haire, Agricultural Development Manager at the East of England Agricultural Society, told me *“whilst livestock shows provide an important social gathering, increasingly the animals winning the prizes are not a true reflection of what commercial farmers need to be trying to breed and sell to meet market requirements and expectations. These misleading market signals are not only damaging to livestock breeding but also to the shows, as their credibility diminishes with farmers and their relevance wanes which takes them further away from their objective of advancing agriculture”*.

With the emergence of technology and data collection, new methods have emerged to assess an animal’s efficiency and productivity. The traditional linear assessment of an animal against its breed type is coming under threat from performance indices such as Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs). The use of EBVs has been promoted within the cattle and sheep industry as a means of making better breeding decisions. It introduces more science and evidential data to the traditional practice of selecting breeding matches solely on visual assessment and knowledge of blood lines. EBVs provide measurements of genetic potential taking into consideration a number of traits such as ease of calving/lambing, maternal attributes, growth and carcass qualities.

EBVs are by no means universally adopted within the agricultural industry and certain breeds do not capture any performance data at all. They are even viewed with some scepticism, as Michael and Melanie Alford, frequent exhibitors from Devon, say: *“we don’t follow EBVs at all... Cattle and sheep breeders are brainwashed by EBV figures. But the figures can be incorrect in the way they are recorded.... When I’m purchasing an animal I buy the animal I like by eye. I’m interested in the*



pedigree, the bloodlines and breed character – that’s not recorded on EBVs.... I’m using showing as a shop window for promoting and selling the animals I’m breeding”.

Steve Jones, a UK breed advisor, on the other hand, said *“there’s credible evidence to show they work. EBVs are not smoke and mirrors. They are based on facts. It’s difficult for people to walk away from shows, because it is part of the whole beef cattle infrastructure. However, shows need to be more comparable to commercial reality. In the dairy industry I would like to see what they have in Europe – progeny shows. That can be a more useful addition, because you’re getting a comparison with future daughters of bulls”.*

Whatever your opinion on EBVs, more and more progressive farmers are embracing this technology to enhance the genetics of their herds and flocks. In an opinion article released in June 2016, the Editor of the Farmers Guardian, Ben Briggs, asked the question whether the role of the agricultural show has changed from being a place to showcase stock to simply a ‘show window’ for animals? He goes on to comment *“does the rise of genomic profiling and EBVs threaten to redefine their role as a genetic showcase?”* and with the rise of data in measuring breeding potential, he asks *“could that take over from a farmer’s visual assessment?”* Whilst there appears to be a growing disconnect between commercial farming and showing, Ben Briggs concludes: *“But while the nature of breeding technology is changing the game, especially for the commercial farmer, the role of shows as a communicator of farming’s values to the wider public will continue to be key.”*

Breeding technology is certainly ‘changing the game’ and, in the sheep industry, there has been the development of new composite breeds to possess commercial traits over pedigree traits. Companies such as Innovis are among the industry leaders in this field with new breeds such as Aberdale, Aberfield and Abertex aimed at combining maternal and carcass traits for the commercial lamb market. Innovis firmly believes that the adoption of these technologies is essential if the industry is to remain globally competitive. The challenge, however, is to change the mind-set of farmers. The marketplace still rewards animals which possess the best physical condition and there is only limited price incentive for performance data.

Very often some of the composite breeds or livestock with excellent EBV figures are not the type of animals you would expect to see in the show ring. They are animals bred for their production efficiency, not to appear on the front page of the farming version of Vogue. But the desire to breed animals which are appealing to the eye runs deep in the DNA of U.K. farmers. Therein lies one of the dilemmas of livestock showing – balancing commercial relevance with pedigree breed type.

Nevertheless, the use of technology and performance data will become more widely used in commercial farming. Ignoring this will be a risk to shows. There are examples of where shows have adopted performance indicators into the live judging of animals. Classes have been introduced open only to animals with above average EBVs or judging criteria have been developed where animals are scored on both their visual assessment and performance rating, which are combined to give an overall placing. Some shows have been nervous of tinkering with the traditional formula of linear assessment, given the risks of confusing the public with technical data and EBVs etc. On the other hand, this could be viewed as an education opportunity where the role of the commentator is a key link between the industry and the public.



Case Study

Livestock Showing at the Sydney Royal Easter Show, Australia

The Sydney Royal Easter Show is run by the Royal Agricultural Society of New South Wales (RAS). First held in 1823, the event is the largest agricultural show in Australia with an average attendance of 850,000 over 14 days. Located in the Sydney Olympic Park, the event brings together the country and the city in a celebration of Australian culture.

At the heart of the Sydney Royal are the livestock competitions which attract close to 30,000 entries in over 5,000 classes. According to the President of the RAS, Robert Ryan OAM: *“The competitions continue to remain an important fabric of our agricultural community, setting benchmarks in excellence, and encouraging development and innovation in Australian agriculture”*.

During August 2015, I was fortunate to spend some time with the Chief Executive of the RAS, Michael Kenny, who believed that remaining relevant in a changing world was a major challenge for shows. Michael said *“the RAS believes that the pure bred competitions are important; however we are introducing more commercial competitions to support the needs of the industry. Competitions such as a sheep and lamb hoof and hook competition; a cattle feed lot competition; a field crop competition; a commercial piggery competition; and others, so as to remain more relevant to the industry”*.

An example of a competition which seeks to combine the visual assessment of a pure-bred with commercial attributes is the Objective Measurement class in the Merino sheep section. Being a dual-purpose breed that can produce high-quality wool and meat, the Merinos are scored on a judging criteria which not only takes into account their visual characteristics of breed type, structure and soundness, but also includes an objective assessment of commercial fleece value, weight and data collected by ultrasound scanning to determine the fat cover, and eye-muscle depth. Each criteria has a weighted scoring with only a fifth of the points awarded for subjective judging, therefore placing greater emphasis on the commercial value of the sheep.

Whilst livestock breeding in countries such as New Zealand and Australia has gone more performance-focussed, the U.K. industry still relies heavily on visual appraisal in making breeding decisions. I believe a sensible balance needs to be achieved. No farmer wants a field of excellent figures, but animals which look like a bag of Liquorice Allsorts. Nor can a farmer expect to buy genetics which will produce the perfect commercial animal without maintaining the skills of good husbandry and stockmanship.

Showing is still a key component in the wider industry. It is a means of marketing livestock to the public but it is also plays an important function in the pedigree livestock market. Show prizes and accolades add value to pedigree stock and is a shop window for herds, flocks and studs in advance of autumn sales.

See Case Study on next page



Case Study

Cattle Show at the Morobe Province Show, Papua New Guinea

The Morobe Province Show is staged on the weekend closest to the full moon in the month of October each year. Held on a 10-acre state-owned showground on the outskirts of the city of Lae, the show attracts an average of 80,000 visitors. Despite being a provincial event, it draws a national crowd being the only agricultural event of its kind in the country.

Livestock showing plays an important part and many local smallholders would bring their best animals in the hope of winning a prize. On the first day of the show, I was told that two delegates from the Next Generation group would be asked to judge the cattle. Rarely do you get an opportunity to judge at a prestigious show literally the other side of the globe so I volunteered together with Hayley Bass representing Queensland Agricultural Shows. Luckily, I could draw on my experience of stock judging from my days as a member of young farmers and we took to the task.

The cattle put in front of us were a mixture of Brahmins and Droughtmasters. Not put off by these strange looking beasts, we did our best to identify some good structural, breeding and/or market traits and placed them accordingly. Most of the animals were not halter trained and they were judged in their pens. After judging each class, the exhibitors were keen to hear our reasons and we had an interpreter to translate our reasons to pidgin English so everyone could understand. In a funny episode, I had one local tell me that if he knew I was looking for good legs and feet, he'd have brought his other cow.

To reflect the divergence in cattle farming in Papua New Guinea, cattle classes were split between smallholder and commercial scale exhibitors. One of the largest exhibitors of cattle and winners of the Champion Bull competition was Ramu Beef. I visited the Ramu beef feed lot a few days before the show and was staggered by its scale. Out of Papua New Guinea's 40,000 national herd, Ramu owns 22,000 of them.

In complete contrast, locals would have herds of only single digits. As such, they showed genuine interest in learning how could they improve their herd and there was a real educational value for exhibitors, as breeding methods of the smallholders are still largely primitive. This cattle show would be very similar to the early shows in the U.K. where the key objective would be to promote best practice in breeding and to identify superior genes. It also highlighted the importance of judge's reasons in offering knowledge transfer to exhibitors.

See photo on next page



Figure 9: (L-R) Phil Franklin, Morobe Show President, presenting the Champion Bull Award to John Smith, Manager of Ramu Beef, with cattle handler and Judges: Aled Jones and Hayley Bass.

Showing is also much more than just breed development and progress. During my visit of the U.S. state fairs, shows for junior exhibitors were far more popular than open shows. Members of 4H and the Future Farmers of America would dominate show rings with a view to promoting youth development and life skills. For example, the objectives of the North Carolina 4H Livestock Programme are:

1. *To develop leadership abilities, build character, and assume citizenship responsibilities.*
2. *To experience the pride of owning livestock and to be responsible for its management.*
3. *To be better prepared for citizenship responsibilities through working in groups and supporting community livestock educational projects and activities.*
4. *To learn skills in livestock production and gain an understanding of the business of breeding, raising, and promoting livestock and their end products.*
5. *To increase knowledge of safety precautions needed to prevent injury to yourself and others while working with livestock.*
6. *To promote greater love for animals and a humane attitude toward them.*
7. *To teach good sportsmanship through a friendly, competitive atmosphere.*
8. *To increase knowledge of animal agricultural by-products and how animal by-product usage touches our lives each and every day.*



The focus on youth was very apparent in all the state fairs I visited. Most fairs were terminal shows where the animals were sold for slaughter at the end, and monies raised to help fund scholarships for agricultural college fees.

Case Study

Ohio State Fair 2015 – Sale of Champions

On the 9th August 2015, I attended the Ohio State Fair with Marla Calico from the International Association of Fairs & Expositions (IAFE). The Fair is organised by an agency of the State Government and runs over a 12-day period attracting an attendance of almost one million people. Occupying 360 acres, the site is very well invested and the General Manager, Virgil Strickler, showed us some exciting plans for two new developments which will provide further multi-purpose exhibition space for the increasing number of out-of-fair events. It was interesting to learn of Virgil's vision for the site which included creating a clean, safe, attractive and landscaped fairground together with well-maintained facilities to ensure maximum enjoyment of visitors. Remarking on his vision, he used the term "beautification" to describe how they landscaped the fairground.

One of the highlights of the day was the Sale of Champions. Being the last day of the fair, all the main champions entered in the junior terminal shows were auctioned off in an elaborate grand sale. A tradition in many of the U.S. Fairs would see the champion animals sold to local businesses who wanted to support the youth of their county or state. Some impressive auction prices were realised in what was a very well managed sale, akin to a theatrical performance, with choirs singing, bands playing, a charismatic presenter and your typical American auctioneer with his fast-talking style and cowboy hat!

Not only livestock was sold, we also had the Champion Block of Swiss Cheese entered in the sale which made an all-time Ohio State Fair record price of \$25,000. That buyer fully deserved his complimentary bottle of wine for his purchase!

The professionalism with which the sale was conducted was hugely impressive and it was televised live all over the State. Equally, the exposure and recognition given to the buyers was extremely well done.

In total, \$264,000 was raised at the sale and much of this would be used to fund the Youth Reserve Programme. The funds for the programme come from the dollars received over a pre-set cap that is placed on the amount each exhibitor can receive. For example, the Grand Champion Market Beef sold for \$50,000, but the cap was \$22,000; therefore the \$28,000 balance would be transferred to the programme. This money is then used to support scholarships to develop the skills of 4H and FFA members. Since its inception in 1995, the programme has awarded \$2,820,375 to approximately 32,500 youth exhibitors.

See photo overleaf

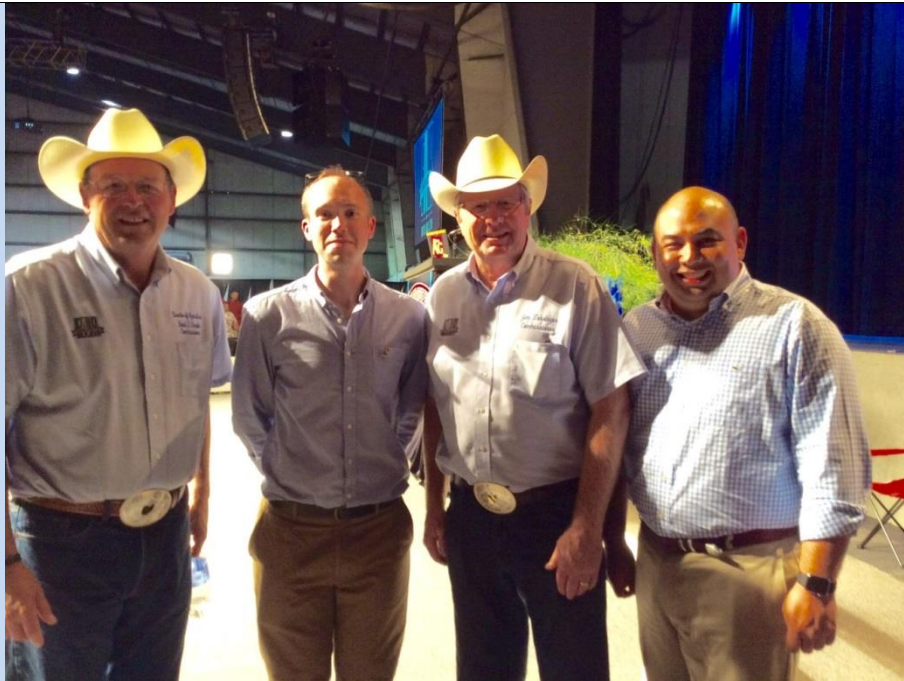


Figure 10: (L-R) David Daniels (Director of Agriculture Ohio State Government), Aled Jones (author of this report), James Zehringer (Director of Natural Resources Ohio State Government), Cliff Rosenberger (Speaker of the Ohio House of Representatives)

At the Grand Sale of Champions. The Grand Champion Market Hog being sold at the Sale of Champions.

Such is the competition amongst junior exhibitors in the U.S., a whole industry has been created in the production of show animals with professional ‘fitters’ offering their services in preparing animals for the show ring. Sales of ‘club calves’ would take place regularly, which is an industry term for quality cross bred calves bred for showing only. In contrast to the preferred traits of the commercial animal in the U.K., show animals in the U.S. would not be bred for their double muscling. Instead the focus would be on breeding for maximum width and depth to achieve the ideal ‘box shape’ animal described as a ‘power house’.

A whole box of cosmetic tricks would be used to create this ideal animal. Described as the most pampered cows in America, an internet sensation began in June 2013 when cattle breeder Matt Lautner from Iowa posted a picture of his “fluffy cows”. Hours of meticulous grooming to include washing, clipping and blow-drying would take place with a whole host of salon-quality products, hairsprays and oils to create the perfect ‘puffed out’ look. Lautner’s “fluffy cows” went viral virtually overnight with over 51,733 likes on Facebook from followers all across the world.

See picture on next page



Figure 11: Texas Tornado – one of the “fluffy cows” internet sensation

Despite the strong focus on visual attributes of the show animal, several fairs such as the Phelps County Fair in Missouri has developed a different model for judging which combines non-visual traits. Market animals are judged on three components which include: (1) the visual show ring assessment, (2) ultrasound grading and (3) daily live weight gain (calculated from Spring weigh-in day). Each component is given equal weighting and the winner is calculated by a points formula which also determines the sale order. With this new method of judging, the overall champion with the highest number of points could (and sometime does) defeat the champion animal on foot. Similar competitions which combine performance data have been introduced at the North American Livestock Exposition at Louisville, Kentucky, and the National Western Stock Show and Rodeo in Denver.

Therefore, to answer the question whether livestock showing is still relevant, you must ask the question: relevant to who? For commercial livestock farmers, it is true that there is a disconnect between the animals which excel at shows and those who commercially make money for the farmer. However, livestock showing still plays an important role in the overall industry and in promoting pedigree stock to the public. Having prime show animals with the excellent husbandry skills of exhibitors on display inspires confidence in the consumer. Competitive displays of animals continue to be a top draw for visitors attending shows and serves an important educational role. As Jim Tucker, former President and CEO of the IAFE told me last August *“kids from urban areas have seen more zoo animals than farm animals”*.

The successful introduction of more performance and commercially focussed competitions will require leadership from show societies, breed societies and the industry as a whole. I firmly believe that the traditional methods must remain, as the identity of many shows is built upon this formula, but a modern approach bringing commercial relevance must be introduced alongside. The impact of bovine TB has had a detrimental impact on the number of cattle entered at U.K. shows and perhaps



consideration should be given to more herd competitions judged out of show? The future of livestock breeding is certainly changing and who knows, farmers may be breeding for health traits in future with food increasingly seen as the new medicine? Whatever the drivers, remaining relevant to the farmer and the consumer must be at the forefront.



Figure 12: A popular attraction - the Parade of Prize Winning Stock at the 2015 Royal Welsh Show

5.5. Animal welfare, biosecurity and disease control

To maintain the credibility and public confidence in the showing of animals, show societies must maintain the highest standards of animal welfare, biosecurity and disease control. Shows have a responsibility to protect the public from zoonotic diseases, i.e. those which can transfer from animals to humans, and to protect the wider industry against the spread of disease, in particular notifiable diseases such as foot and mouth etc. Where there are large gatherings of farm animals, maintaining these standards becomes ever more important.

Whilst high standards of animal welfare were promoted in all the shows and fairs I visited, there have been examples where the practices of some exhibitors in enhancing their animals have been considered harmful to their welfare. Commonly referred to as 'tampering', shows and fairs have taken a very hard line on any such behaviour. For example, an incident of udder tampering was found at the 2013 Great Yorkshire Show which led to a nine-month investigation and resulted in the exhibitors involved agreeing not to show again. The tampering was found by the official show vets and whilst the exact details have not been revealed, it is known that certain methods to enhance the appearance of the udder of a dairy animal include pumping the udders with liquid or gas and sealing the teats. In a statement from the Yorkshire Agricultural Society, the Honorary Show Director Bill Cowing said "*Our industry is too precious to be undermined by those whose intention is to win at any cost, and with no concern for animal welfare*".

An article run by The Northern Echo (a regional newspaper covering North-East England) following the inquiry highlighted other examples of animal tampering at shows which include:



- Hair glued to the backs of animals to give an impression of a straight spine
- Giving animals, particularly chickens, diuretics so they lose water and gain muscle tone
- Dosing rival animals with sedatives to make them lethargic
- Anabolic steroids given to horses, cattle or sheep to enhance muscles
- Bleaching skin, particularly pigs, to enhance appearance.

The term “tampering” covers a broad range of practices, some of lesser and some of greater severity to an animal's welfare. Basic grooming techniques are widely accepted and the U.S. have skilled professional fitters offering their services in improving an animal's appearance for the show ring. Companies such as Sullivan Supplies describe themselves as "*the innovative leader in livestock grooming supplies*" and have stores in Texas, Iowa and California selling everything from shampoos to adhesives. Sullivan Supplies can also be seen with their mobile shop in elaborate trailers selling their products during the show.

Case Study

Drug Testing at the Indiana State Fair

The Indiana State Fair started testing animals for banned substances and illegal drugs in 1992. Their programme of drug testing has continued and has become increasingly stringent following other cases of cheating in nearby state fairs where animals have tested positive for certain substances on slaughter. It is now standard practice at the Indiana State Fair to collect urine samples from all prize winning animals and a limited number of randomly selected entries. Top champions also have their tissue tested after slaughter.

At the 2014 Indiana State Fair where 2,278 market animals were entered, a total of 329 (14%) were drug tested with initial testing undertaken by the Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory at the Purdue University College of Veterinary Medicine. Following the testing, it was revealed that all the top prize winners in the sheep section were stripped of their titles due to positive drug tests. Since 2011, a total of 42 animals has been disqualified. An investigative Indianapolis news channel called WHTR Channel 13 covered the story in dramatic fashion. In a feature called Eyewitness News, YouTube clips can be found highlighting the dark practices of some exhibitors determined to win at any cost.

The actions taken by the Indiana State Fair must be commended as the use of drugs to enhance an animal's appearance is not only harmful to its welfare but it also poses a potential public health threat with drug residue in the meat. But this problem is not unique to Indiana. According to Eyewitness News, other states such as Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Nebraska, Texas, Missouri, Utah and Louisiana have disqualified recent winners for failed drug tests.

Whilst the vast majority of exhibitors do not engage in cheating tactics, the actions of a minority threatens public confidence in food and the credibility of showing. A zero tolerance policy must be adopted at all times.



Figure 13: WHTR Channel 13 Eyewitness News item on drug testing at the Indiana State Fair, 2015

In 2001, the IAFE launched its National Code of Show Ring Ethics which is suggested for use by its members to curtail unethical, deceptive and fraudulent practices. Despite being a voluntary code, it is recommended to all livestock shows in the U.S. and Canada as a means of maintaining the integrity of their event. The code contains many provisions but at its heart are the underlying principles of honesty and maintaining public safety. All animals presented at show events must be free from any illegal drug residues and exhibitors consent to the show management obtaining samples of urine, saliva, blood or any other substance from the animal for use in testing. The code applies to owners, exhibitors, fitters and trainers and any breach may result in the titles, premiums, awards and auction proceeds being forfeited.

Adopting this code or similar rules forms an essential part of protecting the reputation of shows. But there is also a challenge of managing public perception. Certain animal husbandry techniques and stockman skills could be perceived as cruel to an uninformed public. For example, using a nose ring in cattle, sheep docking, using pig boards and sticks. When exercised with skill, none of these are cruel but it highlights the importance of education.

During my visit to the Wisconsin State Fair I met their Agricultural Director, Brian Bolan, who also highlighted the challenges of communicating with a non-farming audience on these showing techniques. Wisconsin had a 'backstage area' designated for animal washing and preparing and an 'animal treatment tent' for exhibitors to administer any medicinal drugs or treatment away from public view. Their focus on cleanliness was also strong in order to present a positive image of agriculture and one of their most prestigious prizes was their herdsman competition for the tidiest cattle lines. Competition was strong with 4H members making a significant effort to maintain the best kept area within county sections, together with promotional posters and displays of their breeds.

Their focus on animal safety was also matched by their commitment to fairgoer safety. Protecting the public from zoonosis has been high on the agenda on both sides of the Atlantic with hand-



washing facilities, signage and measures to limit the possible transfer of disease very apparent at all state fairs. The IAFE had been proactive on this front following a significant rise in the number of outbreaks resulting in illness from presumed contact with E.coli O157:H7 which were associated with fairs in 2004 and 2005. Marla Calico from the IAFE had served on the committee which oversees the 'Compendium of Measures to Prevent Disease Associated with Animals in Public Settings', which has been updated biennially since 2005 and is widely distributed by the U.S.'s National Association of Public Health Veterinaries and the Centres of Disease Control. Since 2005, the IAFE has facilitated a training programme for fair organisers which has now been delivered to representatives from the U.S., Canada, Australia and Zambia.

In 2001, an animal disease of a different kind hit the U.K. Agricultural show industry - foot and mouth. The outbreak saw over 2,000 cases of the disease on farms across the U.K. and over 10 million cattle and sheep were slaughtered. In an attempt to control the spread of disease, all animal movement was stopped, sales halted, public rights of way were closed and many shows were cancelled. Paul Hooper, Society Secretary of the Royal Bath & West of England Society and ASAO Secretary, described 2001 as "*a watershed for the agricultural show industry*". Shows lost significant income and visitors, sponsors and traders found other places to go. In total, it is estimated that the disease cost the U.K. over £8 billion. The impact was devastating.

Case Study

Avian Influenza in the U.S.A.

Another notifiable disease which has had an impact on both sides of the Atlantic is Avian Influenza. During my visit of the state fairs in August 2015, all live exhibitions of birds were cancelled to control the spread of H5N2 highly-pathogenic avian influenza. In states like Iowa, which is considered the leading egg producer in the U.S. producing one in five of the nation's eggs, over 25 million birds from 60 farms were affected by the disease. The scale of the outbreak has been described as unprecedented with a total of almost 45 million birds destroyed in 15 states, in an attempt to contain the disease.

Faced by the cancellation of all live gatherings of birds and potentially empty poultry barns, state fair organisers held discussions facilitated by the IAFE on what do at and how to communicate the message to the visiting public. Clearly, there was considerable disappointment amongst junior competitors, but fair organisers turned this situation into an educational opportunity. *(continued on next page).*



Figure 14: Poster entitled 'Where are the birds at this year's fair?' at the Minnesota State Fair



Displays were erected on the importance of the poultry industry to their state and new competitions were run for the best educational posters providing information on the disease. There were also innovative competitions for the best bird created from recycled material.

Whilst the disease had a huge impact on the agricultural community, the absence of poultry at the state fairs actually helped to raise the profile of the poultry industry and educate a largely non-farming audience.

5.6. Education

The need to inform the public about agriculture and food production has never been more important. State fairs in the U.S. have fully embraced this task particularly given the decline in the farming population. According to Lillywhite and Acharya (2016), less than 2% of the U.S. population live on farms and this proportion is predicted to decline even further. Faced with this trend, evidence suggests that individuals are more likely to be influenced by the media if they do not have direct experience with an issue (Thomson & Dininni, 2015). This trend is not unique to the U.S. and the U.K. has seen fewer and fewer people directly involved in agriculture, as highlighted in section 5.2 earlier.

With the growth in social media platforms and an increasing number of ways the media can influence consumers through smartphones, apps, mobile devices, internet, podcasts, short videos and push notifications etc., there is a growing need for public education about agriculture.

In an article by John Henning, Nuffield Farming Scholar, farmer and show exhibitor, published by Farm Week in May 2016, he says *“given that show audiences are now primarily urban more work remains to be done to ensure that visiting an agricultural show is both an educational and entertaining experience. This raises questions around the information we share – the commercial attributes of animals and their purpose, informative commentaries, judge-along cards, relevant judging reasons for both farmers and consumers...”*. As mentioned in the previous section, the image that shows present must be relevant and credible. The use of judge-along cards is becoming popular as a means of informing in a fun and interactive way. The Kansas State Fair had produced cards which outlines what a judge would look for in an animal, what a judge would look for in a good exhibitor, an explanation of key terms, and an opportunity for the public to place the animals and compare their analysis with the judge. This is a simple yet very effective concept.

In his article entitled *“The way I see it...”* John goes on to highlight the significant corporate interest in shows and the drive from major supermarkets to promote their brand. He says: *“are farmers, as primary producers, allowing their story to be hijacked by others? After all it’s the farmers’ milk, beef or lamb, rather than the supermarkets’ milk, beef or lamb”*. He makes a valid point. As an industry, we must take responsibility for marketing ourselves.

The research on fairs and fairgoers conducted by Dr Lillywhite and staff at New Mexico State University identified that 55% of participants were interested in learning about agricultural issues whilst at the fair. Participants were also asked to rank agricultural issues they felt important to learn about, and food safety ranked highest with 63%, closely followed by locally produced food (57%) and



animal welfare (55%). This demonstrates that there is a desire amongst visitors to learn and shows are well-placed to inform the public on matters they consider important. Getting in early and avoiding misinformation from the media is key.

Case Study

Education at the Indiana State Fair

The Indiana State Fair takes place for 17 days in August each year on a 200-acre fairground and attracts an average attendance of over 950,000. It was expanded from a 12-day fair to a 17-day fair in 2008 to include three weekends. The 2015 theme for the Indiana State Fair was 'The Year of the Farmer' and 17 different farmers from 17 different farm types were chosen to be spotlighted on each day. To demonstrate the diversity of the state's agriculture, they featured everything from pumpkin farming to aquaculture and deliberately used genuine farmers to tell their own story direct to the consumer.

I was fortunate to be given a guided tour of the fairground by Ray Allison, Vice President for Administration, and Stephanie Decamp, Agricultural Education Officer. This included a visit to the Harvest Barn, an educational display on the arable sector of the State, and the Glass Barn which was an interactive education pavilion supported by the Indiana Soybean Alliance.



Figure 15: The Glass Barn Education Center on the Indiana State Fairground

The Glass Barn is built on the concept of transparency in agriculture and includes talks from the featured farmers, a video wall with daily 'facetime with a farmer' Q&A sessions, virtual displays, a uFarm computer game where four people compete against each other at planting through to harvesting, a uEat grocery store game and a pictureU booth where photographs are taken of visitors in a farming scene. Bursting with activity, this hugely impressive barn is open to host school trips throughout the year.

There was also an original Normandy Barn occupied by the Indiana State Department of Agriculture and the "Little Hands on the Farm" exhibit which was the brainchild of the Executive Director, Cindy Hoye. It's been so successful, the Indiana State Fair has helped other fairs to introduce this exhibition.

continued overleaf



“Little hands on the Farm” is an interactive pop-up farm. Young children aged between 2 and 10 are encouraged to play the role of the “farmer” by “harvesting” products from 13 different stations and receive “money” for their efforts which enables them to “buy food” at the grocery store at the end of the trail. Children are expected to take part in a range of farming activities from gathering an egg to planting a tomato to milking a cow.



Figure 16: Little hands on the farm logo designed by the Indiana State Fair

The former President and CEO of the IAFE, Jim Tucker, supported the increasing educational role played by fairs as 98% of the U.S. population is not involved in the production of food and fibre. In his view, the government has “defaulted on its obligation to educate young people on food production”. Similar to the U.K., there is limited if no formal agriculture in the school curriculum. He believes that educating the consumer is critical to maintain food security. And by educating the consumer, he doesn’t just mean children. Adults who are generations detached from the land can often be ill-informed on matters of importance to farming such as bovine TB (Tuberculosis) and GMOs (Genetically Modified Organisms). It was re-assuring that in the Glass Barn, described above, these topics were not shied away from as I saw one information board saying – “Did you know? Genetically modified crops have helped farmers like Joe Steinkamp eliminate 379 million pounds of pesticide applications globally”.

As mentioned by one of the individuals I met, lessons had been learnt from the time where large corporate companies contributed to the increase in agricultural productivity through adopting new technologies and forgot to educate the consumer along the way, which led to misconceptions of farming practices among the public, most notably GMOs.

The reputation of fairs and shows is based on the trust of consumers and it’s important that individuals of all opinions and views are informed of our collective responsibility to feed a growing population. Messages should always be clear, simple and transparent so that trust is maintained.

Case Study

Paul R. Knapp Animal Learning Centre at the Iowa State Fair

The Iowa State Fair situated on the outskirts of Des Moines attracts an average of one million visitors over 11 days. It boasts a 450-acre state-owned fairground with a range of impressive buildings housing almost 20,000 livestock entries annually. According to Board Members over \$75 million has been invested in new buildings, renovations and restorations over the past 20 years. One of those buildings is the Paul R Knapp Animal Learning Centre which opened in



2007 following a generous contribution of \$750,000 by an Iowa businessman and philanthropist, William Knapp, in memory of his brother.

Built to inform urban and rural fairgoers of the importance of livestock production in Iowa, the state-of-the-art facility shows the animal birthing process of cattle, sheep, goats and pigs, together with fundamentals of animal husbandry. The state fair works in collaboration with several institutions, including the College of Veterinary Medicine at Iowa State University which supports the live animal births each day.

It is one of the most popular attractions at the fair and it was said that people would wait for up to three hours to witness a live birth. Large television screens would also provide the watching crowds with a better view of each birth and replay footage taken from previous births. Members of the Iowa Veterinary Medical Association would volunteer and provide commentary to the audience.



Figure 17: A cow in her birthing pen at the Animal Learning Centre, Iowa State Fair 2015

Birthing centres were commonplace in U.S. state fairs and the Miracle of Birth Center at the Minnesota State Fair would send interested fairgoers text updates when an animal was showing signs of labour. The interest generated was staggering and crowds would literally flock to see the birth. Inevitably, not all births would go to plan and there were risks involved. Would live birthing centres work in the U.K.? Not sure, but television programmes such as Lambing Live in the U.K. have proved hugely popular. Described by the BBC as a programme “*capturing the life-and-death drama of lambing as it unfolds*”, it has been seen by millions of viewers and has had a strong educational benefit.

Many other examples of educational activities existed from stage talks, education trails and mobile classrooms: all of which had strong support from their respective commodity groups. Admittedly, I



was travelling through the Midwest, the breadbasket of the America, abundant in resources and productivity. It is even said that the corn production of Iowa exceeds that of China! Clearly, these groups were large, well-funded, and were committing significant resources to educating the consumer.

Whilst the U.S. state fairs are some way ahead of the U.K. in terms of their education delivery, there is increasingly more focus on education amongst U.K. agricultural societies. Societies such as the Royal Cornwall Agricultural, Westmorland, Great Yorkshire, Royal Suffolk, Royal Norfolk, East of England, Three Counties and others are increasing educational content at their shows and some are organising standalone school's days, farm open days and farm-to-fork roadshows aimed at both children and consumer education. Recognised by the ASAO as one of the key functions of agricultural societies and shows, the inaugural ASAO Education Day was held at the Three Counties Showground in January 2015. The day was focussed on sharing best practice between societies and ideas to encourage greater educational content at shows.

There is a real drive towards having interactive educational content combining the use of technology. At my visit to the 2016 Balmoral Show in Northern Ireland, I was very impressed by the live robotic milking exhibition brought by Lely in association with Drayne's Farm from Lisburn. A total of 40 cows made their way to a temporary dairy unit at Balmoral Park where the Lely Astronaut A4 robotic milking system would milk the cows at their leisure. With live commentary and interviews with Lely customers, the exhibition proved highly informative to the public whilst also highlighting the cutting-edge technology used in modern farming. It was no surprise that they went on to win the award for Best Trade Stand Displaying Farm and Horticultural Equipment.

Educational initiatives, however, are only effective if they have a lasting impact. Organisations such as Farm and Countryside Education (FACE) will tell you that it's easy to put a rope around a section of the show and call it education, but there needs to be pre and post show activities and dialogue with schools for the learning to have real value. FACE was originally formed in 2001 as a restricted fund with the Royal Agricultural Society of England (RASE) before it was transferred to a separate charity in 2005. The focus of FACE is to equip teachers and mobilise an industry. With very little agriculture in the school curriculum, FACE is seeking to promote food and farming as the context in which to deliver mainstream STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). Show societies need to focus on creating relationships with schools and keep the conversation going throughout the year, not just during show time. Perhaps the best example of a coordinated and highly effective educational programme delivered through the charitable activities of an agricultural society is the Royal Highland Educational Trust.

Case Study

Royal Highland Educational Trust (RHET)

The Royal Highland Education Trust (RHET) was established in 1999 as the educational charity of the Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland (RHASS). With a full-time Education Manager, team of five permanent staff, six regional coordinators and 1,000 volunteers, the Trust delivers a range of projects and activities including:



- Farm visits
- Classroom speaker talks
- Free educational resource material
- Outdoor education events
- Training farmers and teachers
- The Royal Highland Show education programme



Figure 18: RHET organised farm visit under the title of 'Taking the classroom to the countryside!'

The RHET is funded through a number of grant awarding bodies, sponsorship and donations at both regional and national level. The greatest support and contributions are made by RHASS who employ the central team based at Ingliston House, Edinburgh. Each academic year, the RHET takes over 16,500 children onto working farms and facilitates farmer classroom talks to over 28,000 pupils. Providing learning opportunities for children aged 3 to 18, the RHET also accommodates approximately 300 school groups to the Royal Highland Show each year. With a range of activities available at the show's Education Centre, schools can also explore the showground accompanied by ambassadors and take part in a number of drop-in sessions with stand holders. RHET works in close partnership with a number of educational and rural based organisations to ensure activities are linked to the Curriculum for Excellence and deliver a balanced, unbiased portal of Scotland's food and farming industries.

All RHET services and resources are free to schools in Scotland and it relies heavily on a strong volunteer base which includes over 500 host farms. Each of the 12 regional areas are run and supported by a committee of volunteers who contribute to the national strategic plan. From my discussions with a past chairman of the RHASS, Allan Murray, he highlighted the importance of also promoting agriculture as a career. He described a Schools Day that was jointly organised by RHET and the Border Union Agricultural Society held at Kelso showground. Over 1,250 children from 61 schools attended and were shown around a range of stations including live animal areas, shearing demonstrations, sheepdog display, stick making, farriery, milking, butter making, agricultural machinery displays, renewables, forestry and horticulture etc. Allan described that the day "had really taken off" and sponsorship obtained towards the travel costs was key.

Food and Farming is a growing sector and according to Bright Crop, a cross-industry initiative to promote careers in agriculture, the total food and drink supply chain employs 3.5million people in the U.K., which equates to 11% of all employment. Predicted to need more than 60,000 new entrants over the next 10 years, there is a need for a coordinated push to get new young talent into the industry and highlight the scope of career opportunities available.



Figure 19: Poster promoting agriculture as a career displayed at the 2015 Indiana State Fair

Therefore, societies and shows have much to offer in providing public education and industry promotion. But education must be fun and entertaining. Terms such as 'edutainment' and 'agritainment' are widely used in the U.S. to describe the provision of education and entertainment in an agricultural setting. With so many visitors drawn to shows and fairs by the entertainment on offer, getting the balance right is essential.

5.7. Entertainment

To recognise their changing visitor profile, shows and fairs have introduced more entertainment to their events. A high proportion of fairgoers would attend because of the midway (funfair rides), carnivals, music concerts and food outlets. Not the traditional components you would expect to see at an agricultural show, but many U.K. shows have introduced entertainment in the form of motorcycle display teams, music stages, military bands, parachute displays, flypasts, equine displays and more, to appeal to a broader audience. Indeed, with significant competition in a crowded world of events for the 'entertainment pound', having a range of attractions and displays is essential to maintain visitor numbers.

Increasingly state fairs are seeing their role as being in the 'edutainment' business, thus delivering education in an entertaining fashion. Whilst the entertainment on offer might be one of the main motivations for visitors to attend, the fairs can then be used as vehicles to connect and inform an urban audience on the importance of agriculture. Their focus on providing entertainment and enjoyment extends to all aspects. Even livestock and equine shows are presented in an entertaining way with fairs very good at creating an atmosphere.

I attended the Draft Horse Show at the Iowa State Fair which is ranked in the top four in the U.S. It was an evening show which attracted a strong crowd into their 3,500 seater Richard O. Jacobson Exhibition Centre. The venue was a multi-purpose facility hosting everything from livestock shows to concerts and sporting events. The Draft Horse Show had Clydesdale and Percheron horses competing in driving classes with entrance music, lights and entertaining commentary.

Another example of a traditional livestock show which has added a fizz of entertainment to its competitions is the World Dairy Expo held annually at Madison, Wisconsin. The Supreme Champion ceremony is an elaborate affair where each breed champion is introduced to the ring complete with



spotlights, music and professional presenters announcing the overall winner. The World Dairy Expo is also famous for its coloured shavings which change each year with the annual theme. The event first introduced themes in the 1980s and every year since the showing has been decorated differently - from simple backdrops to extravagant displays. The 2015 theme was “Dairy in our DNA”.

Entertainment in all forms is a big component at the U.S. state fairs with many organisers allocating up to seven-figure budgets to secure high profile displays and big name music artists to draw the crowds. Here are some examples of the entertainment acts, displays and attractions I saw.



'Construction' exhibition at the Indiana State Fair



Mock Court at the Kentucky State Fair



U.S. Navy Band at the Indiana State Fair



Carnival at the Indiana State Fair



Outdoor Music Stage & Arena at the Kentucky State Fair



Skyride at the Ohio State Fair



Giant Sing Along at the Minnesota State Fair



Free Music Stage at the Iowa State Fair



Interactive Social Media wall at the Iowa State Fair

This collage is continued over the page



'Ham Bone' pig racing at the Benton County Fair, Arkansas



Mutton Bustin' (sheep rodeo for kids) at Iowa State Fair



The Fray performing live at the Iowa State Fair



Heritage Center and Museum at the Minnesota State Fair



Pioneer Village at the Indiana State Fair



Space Tower at the Minnesota State Fair



Jason Derulo performing live at the Wisconsin State Fair



Live Giant Reptile show at the Minnesota State Fair



Lego train set at the Ohio State Fair



Midway (funfair rides) at the Kentucky State Fair



Rodeo and Bull Riding at the Indiana State Fair



The Famous Butter Cow at the Iowa State Fair

Figure 20: A photographic collage of entertainment attractions and exhibits from U.S. fairs

Like all shows and fairs, it is a challenge to find new and exciting entertainment acts. For some, however, celebrating their traditional and cultural identity can have strong entertainment value.

By far the best example I came across was the Sing-Sing groups at the Morobe Province Show in Papua New Guinea. *See over page.*



Case Study

Sing-Sing at the Morobe Province Show, Papua New Guinea

In a spectacular festival of colour, culture and song, the traditional dancing groups (or "Sing Sings Grups" in pidgin English) are the highlight of the annual Morobe Province Show. Described as one of the largest and most diverse displays of traditional dancing seen performing in Papua New Guinea, it often attracts between 2,000 and 3,000 performers.



Figure 21: The Sing-Sing in full swing at the 2015 Morobe Province Show

The Sing-Sing can take up to several hours and each tribal group would showcase their unique customary dance, art, music, weaponry and traditional costume. Every aspect would be based on tribal folklore with their unique chanting to the beat of their drums.

Originally, Sing-Sings were organised to encourage peace between tribes, in a time where tribal warfare was commonplace. In my discussions with locals, I learnt that tribal conflict still exists in some remote highland regions where tribes would fight for land, women and pigs (and in that order!). Historically, there would be a prize for the best Sing-Sing group at the Morobe Show, but it caused so much conflict and fighting between groups, there is no longer a prize and tribes are paid appearance money instead.



Figure 22: The famous Asaro Mudmen from the village of Goroka in the Eastern Highlands



Personally, I found the display mesmerising and I was lucky to be allowed exclusive access to the main ring and an opportunity to get up close to the groups. It goes to prove the importance of showcasing a nation's culture and identity.

Up until the 1930s several highland tribes were totally isolated and had no contact with the outside world whatsoever. Therefore the richness of culture on display, which is totally unchanged for thousands of years, is unlikely to be seen elsewhere in the world today.

So far U.K. shows have resisted the introduction of large funfair carnivals. Whilst entertainment is important, this should not come at the cost of over-diluting the agricultural core which is key to a show's identity. When I asked the former President and CEO of the IAFE, Jim Tucker, whether a fair was an industry event or entertainment event, he answered: "*neither, it's a celebration of your community. You need the comfort of tradition and excitement of new. We've got to be careful how we measure the ingredients and mix them together*". It's true that you must get the balance of content right. The challenge is not to tinker too much with the tradition and heritage which are key to an event's identity, whilst introducing new, fresh and exciting content.

5.8. Food is fashionable



Figure 23: Poster using Food on Sticks to promote the 1998 Kentucky State Fair

Food culture is changing in the U.K. with changing lifestyle habits and growing consumer interest in food quality, origin and convenience. Similarly, consumers in the U.S. are becoming more interested in high-quality fresh products, locally produced food and supporting family farms. In the survey conducted by Dr Lillywhite and staff of New Mexico State University, local food was ranked the second most important agricultural issue that visitors were interested to learn about while attending a fair. Furthermore, food is commonly in the top three reasons for attending.

However, despite interest in healthy eating being on the rise, the appeal of attending a U.S. state fair is not driven by the calorie-conscious fairgoer. Completely the opposite. Visitors see fairs as an opportunity for indulgence and never have I come across such a bizarre mix of calorific delights labelled 'fair food'. You could buy almost anything imaginable, provided it was deep-fried and on a stick!



In highly decorative food trailers and vans, you could indulge in anything from a pork chop on a stick, deep-fried Milky Way on a stick, meatball on a stick, cheesecake on a stick, fried peanut butter and jelly sandwich on a stick, fried pickle on a stick, frozen coffee on a stick, deep fried Oreo on a stick, chocolate covered bacon on a stick, Belgian waffle on a stick and even deep-fried salad on a stick!

In an article published online by ABC News on the 'Top 10 State Fair Food Favourites' the food commentator and author of "Talking with My Mouth Full" Bonny Wolf said: *"It is a day when you just eat junk food. It is so a part of going to the fair that it seems excusable... I think that's why people go. It's part of the experience. It's food you don't eat any other time"*.

I had to try some of this 'fair food', for research purposes of course. When I attended the Wisconsin State Fair (which boasts over 54 varieties of food on a stick), I was told that my visit would not be complete without trying their famous Cream Puffs. Unique to the Wisconsin State Fair, they have a dedicated Cream Puff Pavilion which last year sold almost 400,000 of these large cream-filled choux pastry balls. The cream signifies their support of the dairy industry, which Wisconsin is famous for. It is such a highlight of the fair, crowds would join long queues which even made the local news! Cleverly, the fair organisers had used this as a marketing tool and were encouraging visitors to tweet pictures of their puff using the hashtag #PuffLove.

Food features strongly in the event and they have their own competition called the 'Sporkies' for the most unusual food at the fair. Finalists include the Bacon Bottom Porker Pizza, Beer Battered Pretzel, Coated Deep Fried Cheese Curds, Cheesy Smoked Gouda Sidewinder Fries, Deep Fried Pretzel Crusted Brownies On-a-Stick, Gyro Meatballs and much more!

Last year the Orange County Fair in California celebrated its 125th anniversary and attracted an attendance of 1,301,455 over 23 days. In an e-newsletter following the 2015 OC Fair, organisers released the following fun facts and figures about the food sold at the event:

- 15,000 deep-fried coffee balls
- 10,000 deep-fried Oreos
- 5,000 deep-fried Slim Fast Bars
- 10,000 deep-fired avocados
- 3,500 fried frogs' legs
- 11,000 Krispy Kreme triple donut cheeseburgers
- 420,000 pieces of bacon
- 19,700 hot dogs
- 1,000 12-inch deep fried cheesecakes
- 1.25 miles of thick-cut honey bacon
- 4,000 maple bacon donuts

I was quite amazed at the calorific food on offer. Whilst fair food was predominantly an attraction and indulgence, I believe shows and fairs have a broader role in promoting the very best produce and linking the entire agri-food supply chain, spanning from primary production through to



Figure 24: The famous Wisconsin State Fair Cream Puff



consumption. Food festivals and the street food revolution have seen a rapid rise in popularity in the U.K. over the past five years on the back of growing consumer interest in where food comes from. This is an opportunity which shows cannot miss.

Case Study

Royal Highland Show Food Charter

In 2014, the Royal Highland Show launched its Food Charter. The Charter has had the backing of leading food industry bodies in Scotland and is sets out a number of commitments expected of the Show's 37 food traders to ensure every food outlet has the highest quality produce which has been locally sourced (where possible) and ethically farmed.

The two-page Charter has a number of guidelines and minimum standards to set a quality threshold and each food and drink trader is selected on their commitment to the Charter and proven track record. In a Food, Drink & Travel Blog created by Gerry Haughian, he posted an article on the Food Charter with a quote from Gilbert Thomson, Country Refreshments, who has been serving food and drink at the Royal Highland Show for over 30 years and said: *"we are working to produce labels for each of our products that tell the consumer the area that it has been produced in, along with the exact provider, in line with the Royal Highland Show Food Charter guidelines. This gives the customer the chance to see exactly what they are buying and eating - and they know exactly where it has come from. It's a great way to represent Scotland's food and drink."*

Food safety underpins public confidence in farming and I witnessed first-hand the devastating impact lack of consumer confidence can have on an industry when I visited China. The melamine scandal of 2008 has left its mark on the Chinese people where they favour imported goods over their own. The U.K. has experienced similar problems associated with salmonella in eggs in 1989 and the outbreak of BSE in cattle with its suspected link with the human equivalent, CJD, in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Whilst public confidence has largely been restored by now, these events go to show how quickly it can be lost and the severe economic consequences it can have for the industry.

Agricultural societies also need to be aware of changing consumer habits and trends. Health and well-being are becoming more important and diet is a leading risk factor for ill-health in the U.K. At the 2016 Oxford Farming Conference Professor Susan Jebb, Professor of Diet and Population at the University of Oxford, was asked whether food was the new medicine? She answered no, but argued that food is more important than medicine because it can prevent the onset of disease.

Therefore, farmers as primary producers need to recognise changing consumer trends and contribute towards the new healthy food agenda. Who knows – future livestock breeding and crop production techniques may have greater focus on the health traits of produce. Could we be selecting sires on their proven traits to reduce the risk of disease?



Either way, shows can also provide the platform to reconnect with the consumer and highlight the nutritional benefits of food produced by farmers. Consumers are certainly interested in food provenance, traceability and quality and this is an opportunity to strengthen our domestic market for agricultural produce. Food is most definitely fashionable, but I'm not so sure about bowler hats?

5.9. Is the bowler hat really necessary?

The bowler hat has a long history and is an iconic symbol of agricultural shows in the U.K. It was designed in 1849 by the London hat makers, Thomas and William Bowlers, for the hat company Lock & Co of St James's. Originally commissioned to produce a hat that would protect gamekeepers' heads from low-lying branches whilst on horseback, it soon grew in popularity amongst the gentry. Such was the fashionable appeal of this close fitting and low-crowned hat, it became a status symbol and was commonly worn by city bankers up until the 1970s.

The bowler is also famous for becoming a trademark of many celebrities and comedy actors including Laurel and Hardy and Charlie Chaplain. Who can forget the scene out of the 1964 James Bond film where the henchman to the villain Goldfinger, Oddjob, famously threw his lethal, razor-edged bowler hat and decapitated a stone statue? I'm pleased that the bowler hats you see at agricultural shows are not capable of such deadly acts but they do bring an element of mystique, formality and prestige to the show ring. According to an article run by the Telegraph, Lock & Co still sells around 4,000 to 5,000 bowlers each year "mostly to City workers, ex-military gentlemen and young Americans" - and to judges and stewards of agricultural shows no doubt.



Figure 25: Stewards proudly wearing their bowler hats at the Royal Welsh Show

But what's the deal with bowler hats these days? Aren't they just an outdated throwback to the past with no relevance to modern society or shows? Surely there are better forms of headgear to be had?



It is true that there are mixed reviews about bowler hats. Some think they are pointless, naff and hierarchical. Personally, I like them. Yes, a bowler hat is a throwback to the past but we should be proud of our heritage. In addition to serving its primary function of identifying stewards and officials, it also adds to the tradition and theatre of the event. After all, shows need to maintain an element of tradition to preserve their cultural identity. A component which adds to the overall entertainment at shows is valuable.

During the ASAO Conference in 2014 hosted by the Royal Highland Agricultural Society of Scotland, there was a presentation from Nancy Riach, Partnerships & Development Manager at The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo. Whilst she did not mention anything about bowler hats, she highlighted the need to understand the “*essence of your show*”. By that she meant that there are components which are central to an event’s character and identity that should always be preserved.

That said, it does not take away from the need to innovate in order to remain fresh. The predicted growth in wearable technology may have a knock-on effect on the future development of the bowler. In a design that has remained unchanged since 1849, could we see smart devices incorporated into bowler hats to record results, cameras to take photos of prize-winning animals, GPS to record the location and distance travelled of stewards? The opportunities are endless. But there is one design feature that has lasted the test of time and will continue to be needed at agricultural shows – the natural water repellent qualities of fur felt!

5.10. I don’t want welly weather!

Weather is one of the major challenges faced by large outdoor events. Unlike other challenges, it is a variable beyond the control of organisers. However, the planning, preparation and response to adverse weather can be controlled in order to minimise the risks involved. Creating a safe environment for visitors is essential for the continued success of agricultural shows. Below are three case studies illustrating the effect adverse weather can have on events and the importance of protecting the reputation of shows and fairs.

Case Study

Flooding at the 2015 Royal Welsh Winter Fair

The Royal Welsh Winter Fair is a two-day prime-stock show held in late November/early December each year. Over its 26-year history, it has had its share of severe weather conditions with several cold and frosty events, none more so than the -17 °C temperatures recorded in 2010, and was the coldest place in Britain at the time. But the 2015 event posed challenge of a different kind. Following a prolonged period of rainfall in the Wye catchment, river levels on the first day of the Fair rose to the second highest ever recorded. The car parks flooded suddenly with flood waters up to one meter deep in places.

As darkness descended and fireworks lit up the night sky, staff, officials and volunteers of the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society (RWAS) coordinated the



recovery of vehicles in what were very challenging circumstances. Public safety remained paramount at all times and, thankfully, no one was harmed.

On the following day, the focus turned immediately to providing assistance to over 50 affected parties who had suffered damage or loss to their vehicles. The RWAS's insurers concluded that the Society could not be held liable for the damage caused, but they took a pragmatic view of the circumstances and agreed to settle all valid claims on a without prejudice basis, i.e. without accepting any liability.

In order to address the concerns of those affected parties and to maintain the reputation of the RWAS, the Chief Executive and I personally telephoned each and every party to notify them of the decision.

Case Study

Flooding at the 2013 Calgary Stampede, Alberta, Canada

The Calgary Stampede is a world-renowned annual rodeo held in July every year in Alberta, Canada. The 10-day event attracts in excess of one million visitors and features one of the world's largest rodeos celebrating western culture and heritage. The event has its roots with the Calgary and District Agricultural Society which held its first fair in 1886. The first rodeo, however, was not held until 1912. Since then it has grown enormously in popularity and their site called Stampede Park contributes approximately \$345million in direct spending in the province and has a significant all-year-round economic impact.

On the 20th June 2013, some two weeks before the annual Stampede, Southern Alberta suffered a massive flooding incident. A period of heavy rainfall had triggered a catastrophic flood described by the provincial government as the worst in Alberta's history. A State of Emergency was declared at the City of Calgary and 100,000 people were evacuated. Virtually all of Stampede Park was under water and the prospect of holding the Stampede looked bleak.

On the 24th June, Stampede President Bob Thomson told a press conference that the Stampede would go ahead "*come hell or high water*". This rallying cry became the slogan for the mammoth effort to get Stampede Park ready for what they called "the Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth". T-shirts proudly displaying this slogan started to be sold online with proceeds donated to the Canadian Red Cross Alberta Floods Fund. In total, it raised a staggering \$2.1 million.

The President was determined that the Stampede would go ahead as it never had been cancelled despite two world wars and a great depression. Therefore, contractors from all across Canada and the U.S. arrived to help with the flood recovery which involved the cleaning and repairing of 63 buildings and rebuilding of the entire track. In a miraculous turnaround, Stampede Park reopened on the 4th July and welcomed 1.1 million visitors over the following 10 days



Figure 26: The Calgary Stampede T-Shirt carrying the slogan 'Hell or High Water'

Case Study

Thunderstorm at the 2011 Indiana State Fair

On the 13th August 2011, a severe gust of wind from an approaching thunderstorm hit a temporary stage structure at the Indiana State Fair causing it to collapse killing seven people and injuring 58 others. An American country duo called Sugarland were about to come onto the stage when the collapse occurred at 8.46pm. Only some minutes before, the National Weather Service issued a severe thunderstorm warning indicating that hail with a diameter of one inch and winds over 60 miles per hour were expected. Whilst fair organisers knew that there was a risk of adverse weather this warning, followed by the delayed decision to evacuate, was simply too late.

A long investigation followed to look into the cause of the collapse and evidence was gathered on the structural failure of the stage roof together with the actions of the state fair, their communication and response. A number of legal cases followed and, in 2014, the State of Indiana and other defendants settled these cases for \$50 million.

Lessons certainly had been learnt and when I visited the fair in 2015 and met senior state fair officials, I was told of their Operations Centre which is staffed 24/7 with all emergency services including the police, fire and medical response units together with an on-site meteorologist who can advise the safety teams if weather conditions are likely to impact the fairground. Like all of the Midwest of America, summer weather patterns can be highly changeable and bring both extreme heat and severe storms with a potential for tornados.



These case studies highlight the impact weather can have on events and the importance of maintaining public safety at all times. Having emergency response procedures in place is essential. In a research paper written by J. T. Mitchell from the University of South Carolina into the perception of threat and risk amongst visitors, he states that safety concerns can have a significant impact on their experience. He gives the example of the 2004 Bloomsburg Fair which lies in the floodplain of the Susquehanna River. One week prior to the fair the river burst its banks due to Hurricane Frances and even though the flood waters had receded in time to stage the fair, rumours of cancellation and that raw sewerage had contaminated the site led to a significant drop in attendance (509,358 in 2004 compared with 655,472 in 2003).

Show and fair organisers know all too well that poor weather can keep visitors away and have a big impact on gate receipts. More shows are now introducing discounted e-tickets in a drive to boost pre-event ticket sales. This has the effect of securing income whatever the weather during the event and also encourages attendance by those who have bought and are committed to use their ticket.

If only there was a way to manipulate the weather to ensure clear blue skies during events? This is not as impossible as it may seem. Both the Chinese and Russians are reported to have used technology to modify the weather. Using chemicals in a process called ‘cloud seeding’, this can stimulate rain and later secure clear skies. It is said to have been used for the opening ceremony for the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics and Moscow May Day Parade. It is also rumoured to have been used for the Royal Wedding of Prince William to Kate Middleton in 2011, but denied by Buckingham Palace.

It’s a costly process and probably a bit far-fetched for the agricultural show world, where a bit of rain and mud adds to the fun!

5.11. Far more than just a show

So far this report has focussed predominantly on agricultural shows. When I interviewed Iain Nicol, Chief Executive of the South of England Agricultural Society, he said: *“you can have a society without a show, but you can’t have a show without a society”*. The role of the agricultural society is often lost as most people associate all its work with the main public showpiece – the annual show. Why do people not know more about the charitable work of societies? Have societies missed a communication trick? After all, societies are often member-led organisations and exist throughout the year.

In an article published in the Guardian in April 2016 Carla Miller, the paper’s Charity Consultant, highlighted that *“charities need to remember why they exist – and shout about it”*. Knowing the purpose of your organisation is fundamental to all your activities. The Oxford English Dictionary defines purpose as *“the reason for which something is done or made or for which something exists”*. Carla Miller argues that charities should be the best at explaining their purpose but businesses such as Apple, Virgin and Innocent drinks have beaten them to it. These companies have cultivated strong brand loyalty amongst their customers by successfully selling their product and their purpose. According to Miller, the reason why charity brands are not having the same impact is because they



are too caught up in telling their supporters what they do; they forget to communicate the reasons why they do it.

However, there is one U.K. charity which has successfully communicated its core purpose and has managed to achieve staggering levels of member loyalty and retention. Being the largest voluntary conservation organisation in Europe, the National Trust recruits more than one member every minute during the summer months, adding to a total membership of over four million. The only other organisation in the U.K. to have a larger membership is the AA. Head of Support Loyalty at the National Trust, Lucy Inskip, said in her article entitled 'A working culture with passion and commitment like nowhere else' that "*engaging supporters and growing support is a key part of our organisational strategy. We want to encourage members to get more involved in what we do and bring them closer to our core purpose*". Central to this agenda is improving communication.

Agricultural societies could learn lessons here. You will often see Facebook pages and Twitter feeds of societies very active in the build-up and during events, then lie almost dormant for the rest of the year. The public cannot be blamed for thinking that not much else happens. Whereas in reality, societies are busy organisations which deliver a whole host of charitable aims through offering bursaries, scholarships, awards, volunteering opportunities, consultation responses - all whilst running large multi-purpose event centres providing addition income essential for furthering their aims and objectives.

It is also fact that the vast majority of members join societies to take advantage of the admission badges to the show and use of hospitality areas. Very few join because they believe in the work that charities deliver over and above the show. Whilst the charitable aims of agricultural societies are still relevant today, further clarity is required on the way in which these are delivered and communicated. Being clear and having a sense of pride in your purpose needs to be at the heart of the work of agricultural societies – from culture to communications. A society is more than just a show – and people need to know about it.

5.12. A Society with no show

Perhaps the most famous society that no longer has an annual show is the Royal Agricultural Society of England (RASE). Established in 1838, the RASE was formed to meet the needs of a growing population by increasing the productive capacity of agriculture through the application of science. The RASE held its first show in 1839 and was granted its Royal Charter in 1840 by HRH Queen Victoria. The 19th and 20th century saw significant agricultural progress, in which the RASE played an influential role. In its long history, the RASE can boast many achievements including the formation of the Royal Agricultural College in 1845, creation of the U.K.'s first experimental research stations in the 1870s, establishment of a national examination board for agriculture in 1899, tractor trials in 1920, formation of the Rare Breeds Survival Trust in 1973, establishment of Linking Environment & Farming (LEAF) in 1990 and the creation of Farming and Countryside Education (FACE) in 2001.

Much of this history is captured on the website of the RASE but, strangely, there is one glaring omission – the last Royal Show in 2009. The RASE announced in April 2009 that the upcoming Royal Show would be the last after 160 years of history. Having lost significant sums of money, reportedly



in excess of £200,000 per year, the RASE decided that the show was not financially viable and could not continue in its present form. Put simply, the show was haemorrhaging money.

The Royal Show was famous for being one of - if not the largest – the agricultural shows in the U.K., firmly established in the British farming calendar. Traditionally, it had always been a business event but over its latter years it suffered from declining interest, loss of agricultural focus, cancellation following the foot and mouth outbreak of 2001 and torrential rain in 2007 which forced the show to close early. All of which contributed towards its decline.

As the curtain fell on the last ever Royal Show, Dennis Chamberlain, the communications director of the RASE said: *"I think it's fair to say that the agricultural gods have not smiled on us recently"*. He went on to explain *"that we have not reacted fast enough to the changing pace of farming in this country"*.

As hinted by Dennis Chamberlain, weather and disease were not entirely to blame for the demise of the Royal Show. There is no doubt that the RASE's sister technical events, namely: Cereals, Pig and Poultry, Grassland and Muck were competing with the Royal Show. These events made more business sense for farmers in their busy modern lifestyles. In Clive Aslet's booklet 'Agricultural Societies & Shows: Past, Present & Future' he recalls *"The Royal had failed to make the transition to the reality of the 1990s when almost everything in the traditional countryside seemed to be going wrong, and farmers were being urged to grow golf courses or houses rather than crops. Farmers are now far busier people than they were in the past; they don't have the time to spend several days on a showground. Modern communications have rendered the dissemination of knowledge element of agricultural shows redundant. The Royal's traditional audience found its needs better served by a plethora of smaller technical events, while it failed to attract the general public. Yet its demise came just as the prospects for agriculture was brightening"*.

There were also lessons to be learnt on prudent financial management and fiscal control. The RASE's failure to effectively manage its finances forced the decision to end the Royal Show. As explained to me by the current Chief Executive of the RASE, David Gardner: *"they had no option to but to stop the show, otherwise the RASE would have gone under"*.

Appointed in 2012, David Gardner, was tasked with taking the RASE in a new direction and create a future without a show. Faced by significant levels of debt and a large pension fund deficit, the RASE had to take some tough decisions, one of which was to auction the RASE's collection of historic cups, trophies, literature and artwork. Whilst having to defend this hugely unpopular decision, David Gardner confirmed that the sale was necessary to clear the RASE of its legacy debts and allow the society to pursue its new agenda.

Case Study

Innovation for Agriculture (IfA)

The RASE in partnership with 15 other Agricultural Societies has established the 'Innovation for Agriculture' initiative. Drawing inspiration from the original motto of the RASE, "Practice with science", the initiative aims to communicate innovations of real commercial value to farmers. Under the leadership of the



Chief Executive, David Gardner, Nuffield Farming Scholar, who has travelled the world to study new technologies for UK agriculture and food including the genetics of plants and animals, functional food, robotic studies and smart engineering, has set up IfA as a new extension service to farmers in England.

I interviewed David as a part of my Scholarship and he explained the need for a coordinated extension programme in England given the fragmented nature of research and science in the U.K. He believed there was a gap that needed to be filled and, in his words, he wanted to “identify a ripple that will become a wave”.

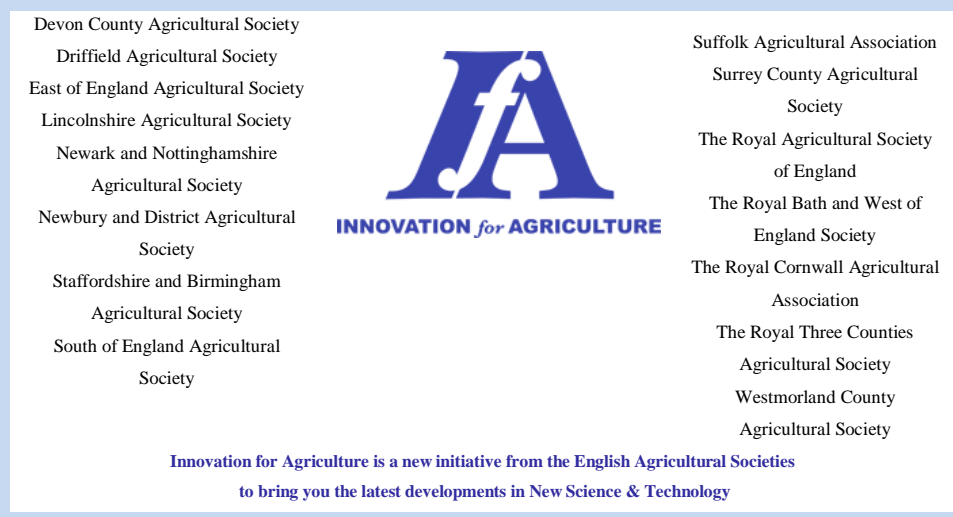


Figure 27: The consortium of 15 agricultural societies part of Innovation for Agriculture

IfA is an independent registered charity which draws its directors from across the consortium and resources from the RASE. By working with 15 English Agricultural Societies, IfA aims to deliver new science and innovation to farmers through multiple methods of communication including the website, publications, conferences, seminars, workshops, on-farm demonstrations, webinars and other new media. Between October 2013 and January 2016, a total of 75 events had been delivered and the consortium of agricultural societies provides excellent geographical spread across the country.

The partner societies also offer well-established hubs for the rural community, ideal platforms for the delivery of technical information, and a membership network to communicate with. The aim of the initiative is to develop sector specific centres of excellence and it has already established centres of excellence in precision livestock and animal welfare, soil and water and renewable energy, which are all based at Stoneleigh Park.

IfA is seeking multiple funding streams and has so far raised a total of approximately £600,000 from various major foundations and private trusts and the initiative has been awarded a Horizon 2020 grant through the European Union. This grant has secured a total of €2 million funding shared between 16 partners from nine different countries. The total cost of the project is estimated to be in the region of £16.6 million and the challenge for IfA is to achieve a spread of income streams and grow the ratio of earned income in comparison



to donations and grants. Whilst still in its early stages, David Gardner, and IfA's chairman, Henry Cater, have set out a clear vision to develop an ambitious extension service aimed at getting the industry to meet the challenge of 'sustainable intensification'.

In addition to pursuing the IfA initiative, the RASE continues to run two successful trade fairs – Grassland & Muck and Pig & Poultry. Both of these are commercial ventures yielding a reasonable return. Whilst IfA has some way to go before the full project becomes reality, I admire the determination of those involved to safeguard a future for the RASE and for returning to its roots to understand its role and position within the industry. According to David Gardner: *“the creation of IfA has made people think – are we a show society or an agricultural society? Does running a show dominate the work of societies?”*

Either way, the well-documented demise of the Royal Show has highlighted the challenges facing modern societies and shows. At its heart lies the importance of sound financial managements and it warns everyone of the risks of complacency. Other shows like the East of England have suffered a similar fate. In 2013, organisers decided to stop the show on the back of falling visitor numbers and losses of “several thousand pounds”. After 200 years, it is said that the show had become disconnected from its agricultural roots and lost its way. There is no doubt that running a successful and financially viable show is a challenging place to be. That is why charities must think more like businesses.

5.13. A charity is still a business

Charities and not-for-profit organisations are often referred to as the “third sector”, in contrast to the public and private sectors. In the past, third sector organisations have been criticised for being inward-looking and painfully slow to change. Now the sector has been encouraged to be more business-like. And rightfully so.

Of course charities must remain true to their philanthropic principles, but they also need to apply a business mind-set. Donors who give their time and money to charities expect to see results. Therefore, proof that their investment is achieving an impact relies upon a business approach to create efficient organisations which employ competent people, have strong financial control, utilise their resources well, maximise their assets, recognise their value, deliver excellent customer service and work towards clear measurable goals.

Agricultural societies tend to rely more on their trading activity to generate funds as opposed to charitable donations and fundraising. In order to benefit from the generous tax advantages afforded to charities, all trading activity must align itself with their charitable aims and objectives. The single largest activity which generates the majority of income for most agricultural societies is the staging of their annual show: although, for many, the show is a net cost to their budgets. It is a fact in the U.K. that most agricultural shows struggle to make a profit and some societies accept this to be the norm. Nigel Pulling, Chief Executive of the Yorkshire Agricultural Society and Chartered Accountant, believes that societies are *“not ambitious enough and have set the bar too low”*. From a purely



business and commercial perspective, Nigel Pulling went on to explain that *“shows do not deliver a reasonable return on investment. They are very weather dependent. In bad weather, shows are likely to make a loss, so making a decent surplus during good years is essential to keep it going. The aim for everyone, however, should be to make money even when it rains!”*

But is holding a show all about the money? Some would argue that the show is an essential vehicle to deliver the charitable aims and objectives, which is more important than financial return. It is an expression of the society’s core values – to promote agriculture and its allied industries. Therefore, whilst robust fiscal control is essential for the sustained impact and survival of societies, it should not come at the cost of their core purpose. It is important to know your return on investment. But return is not always calculated in the normal business way. As Nigel Pulling said: *“if you analyse each component from a strict commercial viewpoint, you wouldn’t do it. Some of our projects may appear like financial lunacy, but you’ve got to see the bigger picture and look at a show as a whole”*. Calculating a financial return on your investments is easy. Calculating the intangible charitable return is not so.

In my interview with Colin McDonald, Chief Executive of the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society, he stressed that societies exist to serve a “public benefit”. He went on to say that you should *“never lose sight of your charitable aims, but you also can’t carry out those aims without generating funds. You need what is called ‘enabling finance’ ”*. Enabling finance comes in many forms: for example the Royal Highland Agricultural Society of Scotland benefits from income generated by its Royal Highland Exhibition Centre and its close proximity to Edinburgh Airport, the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society benefits from income from their commercial developments at their King’s Hall site in Belfast and the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society benefits from their unique feature county system whereby the 12 historic counties of Wales take it in turn to fundraise for the show.

Therefore, the third sector must straddle two different mind-sets. Firstly, they must link all of their activities to their core aims. Secondly, the delivery of those aims must demonstrate a return. Return is measured in both financial performance, i.e. “the bottom line”, and the charitable benefits of furthering agricultural progress. For voluntary organisations, this can be a tricky task. A lot of societies will have well-meaning volunteers who simply want to spend money. Whilst charities have the latitude to engage in activities which would not be possible in commercial reality, they cannot be oblivious to the hard financial facts. The risks of these have already been highlighted in my previous chapter.

Benchmarking and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are common business tools to improve the efficiency of organisations. The challenge of effective benchmarking lies in the adoption of common accounting protocols between agricultural societies. This is probably not practical. You must always compare apples with apples. That said, greater sharing of financial data could help societies in setting goals and targets for improved performance. The use of KPIs are widely adopted, from the number of competitive entries in the livestock sections, number of trade stands, percentage split of trade stands - agricultural and commercial - sponsorship ratios, level of enjoyment by visitors from exit surveys to social media footprint etc. All of which need to be aligned to financial performance. None more so than the much-talked-about statistic of attendance figures. Varying degrees of accuracy can be attached to such figures and several shows and fairs are moving away from publishing attendance figures, despite the hunger from the press and media for these statistics as



they appear to consider them as the only measure of success. I don't believe it is. As all show organisers will know – it's not the number of people through the gate that's important, it's the money at the gate you need to watch.

In an article written by Dani Griffith-Traweek, Event Marketing & Sponsorship Director at the Colorado State Fair, published in the IAFE magazine (July/August 2015 edition), she highlights that many fairs and rodeos in the U.S. struggle to remain financially viable. This has led to a growth of fundraising and sponsorship activities to safeguard the future of their events. With sponsorship and marketing budgets under squeeze by many companies and businesses, there is a need to be more creative in designing packages. According to Dani Griffith-Traweek *“the days of putting up a banner and calling it good are gone.... Sponsorships are no longer a donation. They're investing in you because your property can create a measurable return on their investment. Tools like surveys, attendance figures and a follow-up report are your biggest assets”*.

Therefore, the ability to raise funds and think more like businesses is essential. Having a strong financial plan is vital to sustain the delivery of charitable aims. Consequently, societies in the U.K. and fair organisers in the U.S. have had to identify new income streams. Showgrounds and fairgrounds are no longer designed for the sole purpose of staging a show or fair; they are now labelled as event centres in an attempt to diversify their portfolio of trading activities.

5.14. Diversification on showgrounds

During the 1960s many agricultural societies in U.K. settled on permanent showgrounds. This brought many practical and logistical benefits for staging an annual show but, as Sir Gerald Beadle (past chairman of the Royal Bath & West) pointed out in 1966, it would be *“bad business and bad public policy to occupy these magnificent two hundred acres permanently with nothing in mind but a four-day show. We can't farm it in the proper sense because we need it for the Show at the height of the farming year. To use it merely as a sheep ranch would be wasteful. We must devise and encourage suitable and profitable uses for the Showground all year round”*.

Therefore, societies have been encouraged to utilise their assets to grow out-of-show income and enabling funds. You will often see showgrounds in the U.K. used for antique fairs, car boot sales, dog shows, caravan shows, ram sales, horse sales, conferences, meetings, weddings - and the list goes on. Below are a four case studies illustrating some of the examples of diversification I came across on my travels and interviews.

<p style="text-align: center;">Case Study</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Indiana Farmers Coliseum</p> <p>During my visit to the Indiana State Fair in August 2015, I was struck by one of the most imposing and landmark buildings on the fairground. With its iconic architecture, the Indiana Farmers Coliseum was built in 1939 as a part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration (WPA). The WPA was an ambitious project which employed millions of unemployed people across America to carry out public works. Many fairground buildings were built all across the U.S. at that time and perhaps this is one of the finest examples.</p>
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Figure 28: The Indiana Farmers Coliseum at the Indiana State Fair

It was originally built as a livestock pavilion and it has been host to thousands of events since, one of the most famous being a performance by The Beatles in 1964, the only time they ever performed in Indiana. In 2012, the coliseum underwent a \$53 million renovation programme to bring the building up to modern standards. Public safety is now incorporated into the building design and crowd management protocols. The building is now fully equipped for what the organisers describe as “a new era of sports and entertainment”. It attracts over one million visitors annually with events ranging from professional sports, live music concerts, boxing nights, vehicle auctions, horse shows, exhibitions, boat, sport and travel shows, high school and college ceremonies etc. It is also home to the Indy Fuel ice hockey team and the Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) Jaguars basketball team.

This is a great example of a building which has been modernised with versatility and multi-purpose functionality in mind.

Case Study

Great Yorkshire Showground

The Yorkshire Agricultural Society (YAS) was founded in 1837 and is a registered charity with approximately 11,500 members. The YAS occupies a 250-acre showground on the outskirts of Harrogate. The YAS’s offices are located in their Regional Agricultural Centre which incorporates their farm shop and café called ‘Fodder’. Built in 2009 at a cost of £5.1 million, the Regional Agricultural Centre has received a number of awards including the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) Pro Yorkshire Award and a RICS national commendation for sustainability.

“Fodder” has been described by the magazine ‘Yorkshire Life’ as a “successful blueprint for farm shops”. 85% of the food sold comes from Yorkshire and Fodder sells produce from over 350 local farmers and businesses. Having run for over six years, it has been a hugely successful enterprise which has increased its turnover every year and reached £2.6 million in 2015.



Figure 29: The Fodder Food Hall & Café at the Great Yorkshire Showground

In addition to Fodder, the YAS has a number of commercial trading operations including their Yorkshire Event Centre, Pavilions of Harrogate and the Harrogate Caravan Park. The Yorkshire Event Centre covers the letting of two main exhibition halls for both commercial and charitable activities. In 2016, the YAS completed its “*largest single business investment ever made on the showground*”, according to their Chief Executive, Nigel Pulling.

Having invested £11.5 million in a new state-of-the art exhibition hall, the YAS can boast the largest single-span space in the North of England, equivalent in size to 3.5 Olympic swimming pools. With a 36 metre glass front elevation and 4,320 square metres of exhibition space, the new facility was officially opened in June 2016. To showcase its versatility, the opening included an exhibition of luxury cars, a dinner for 400 guests, conference seating and funfair rides. The building replaces the previous Hall 1 which had reached the end of its productive life. Not only does this new facility hope to attract a healthy return on investment, it will also be used to further the charitable remit of the YAS with the first official event being a Countryside Day for over 6,000 school children to learn about farming and the countryside.

In 2015, the Yorkshire Event Centre had a record turnover of £1.4 million bringing the total income from commercial trading operations to £4,791,089. With total income from shows amounting to £3,415,514 for the same period, this represents a split of 58% and 42% between commercial trading income and show income respectively.

For most U.K. societies, show income would be the dominant item on their financial statements, but the work of the YAS in developing a strong



commercial arm has enabled them to further their charitable activities through: organising educational events, supporting other agricultural welfare charities, personal development of individuals in the agricultural industry through awarding scholarships and bursaries, knowledge transfer through facilitating collaboration between academics and farmers to promote scientific advances, and encouraging younger forward thinking members of the industry with its Future Farmers of Yorkshire group.

The YAS is proving that it is more than just a show, but you cannot do this without the ability to generate funds. Much of the financial strength of the YAS came from the sale of commercial land to Sainsbury's Supermarket in the early 1990s. Interestingly, the society included a proviso in the sale to Sainsbury's that the supermarket must shut down for the duration of the Great Yorkshire Show and that the society can use the car park for their disabled visitors. It is the only Sainsbury's supermarket in the U.K. that closes for any reason other than for Christmas day. Yorkshire people must be good negotiators!

Case Study

Sydney Royal Easter Show

The Sydney Royal Easter Show is the largest ticketed event in Australia. The show moved to its permanent city home at Moore Park in 1882 and then moved to the Sydney Olympic Park in 1998. The 30-hectare showground is a legacy site from the 2000 Sydney Olympics and by now needs renovation, and some exhibition buildings need expansion. Under the Sydney Showground Master Plan 2030, the Royal Agricultural Society of New South Wales (RAS) has ambitious plans to grow and make their showground the best major event venue in Sydney.

Their strategic plan has targets to identify new business opportunities and increase revenue outside the show. The showground already boasts a 7,000 seater indoor arena called The Dome (largest clear span timber structure in the southern hemisphere), a 45,000 seater sports stadium home to the Greater Western Sydney Giants Australian rules football team, and the Sydney Thunder Cricket Team, several exhibition halls and agricultural buildings etc. Plans also include the construction of a new Performing Arts Centre.

Whilst the former venue at Moore Park was much-loved by many of the visitors to the Sydney Royal Easter Show and there were concerns over the move away from the city centre towards the western suburbs, the transport and infrastructure links of the Sydney Olympic Park are much better. This has certainly enabled the RAS to pursue its strategic agenda to make the show more accessible and benefit from better-invested facilities.

See photo of Sydney Olympic Park on next page



Figure 30: Aerial photograph of The Sydney Olympic Park

Case Study

Balmoral Park, Northern Ireland

In 2012, members of the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society (RUAS) voted to redevelop the society's existing showgrounds at the King's Hall in Belfast and relocate the Balmoral Show to the former Maze Prison Site, southwest of Belfast. More than 600 members gathered in the famous King's Hall Conference Centre, with the vast majority voting in favour of the move. Due to competition from competing sites, the King's Hall could no longer deliver the required enabling finance from its exhibition and concert business.

The new site at Balmoral Park has enabled the Show to expand considerably, moving from a 32-acre site to a 65-acre events park. But relocating within a 12 month window has not been without its challenges. Most notably, there are still some issues with ad hoc car parking with visitors commenting on long delays in leaving the showground. That said, any new site takes time to establish. The benefit of starting from a blank canvass allows organisers to identify the best layout to manage footfall and seek the most efficient ways of supplying services and essential infrastructure. Visitors will always judge an event on the most basic creature comforts of adequate seating, clean and well-signposted toilets and good mobile phone signal.

After relocating, the RUAS went about to construct a new exhibition hall and, in November 2015, doors to the new Eikon Centre opened. In a multi-million



pound investment, the Eikon offers 5,100 square meters of exhibition space with superfast Wi-Fi, free parking for up to 4,000 cars and is only 30 minutes from Northern Ireland's two main regional airports.



Figure 31: The Eikon Exhibition Centre, Balmoral Park, Northern Ireland

These four case studies highlight the focus that is being placed by societies and fair organisers across the world on developing stronger commercial operations to support their charitable activities. In each of these examples, the principles of versatility, multi-functionality and flexibility have been incorporated into building designs. Not all U.K. show societies will be able to share their venues with large professional sports teams, but it goes to demonstrate the commercial opportunities available to utilising facilities during the off-season. I'm sure all showgrounds and fairgrounds will have buildings that are superb for only a handful of days each year, but remain largely useless for the rest. Those days are gone.

Asset management and having a clear masterplan for the development of land and buildings form an important part of any strategic plan. With U.K. societies trying to reduce their reliance on show income in order to spread the risk to their organisations, this will lead to a restructuring of societies in order to deliver those aims.

5.15. The importance of good governance

On the face of it, governance might seem a dry, boring and dull subject. And for the most part, that is true. I did not set out to conduct a detailed study into how charities and not-for-profit organisations prepare their articles or memorandums of association, bye-laws, rules or regulations.



Nor did I want to get bogged down in the constant flow of increased regulation imposed on charities. Instead, I wanted to focus on the key principles which are essential for the efficient running of organisations.

Both fair board members in the U.S. and trustees of agricultural societies in the U.K. are largely elected volunteers. The only difference is that state fairs would typically be run by an agency of their state government and, as such, would have some government-appointed board members. At the Iowa State Fair, for example, the Board consisted of 12 elected members, three of which were state appointments which included the Governor, Deputy Governor and Secretary of Agriculture, given the economic importance of the fairground.

The size of boards varies immensely. Whilst there are no hard and fast rules over what size a board should be, the truth of any committee is – if it's too big, it becomes ineffective. When a board is too large, it becomes difficult to conduct the business effectively and board members feel their involvement is only passive with limited input or influence. On the other hand, if the board is too small, the role of a board member might become burdensome and it fails to provide adequate scrutiny for the organisation.

In my interview with Nigel Pulling from the Yorkshire Agricultural Society, he referred to a governance review he instigated in 2006. At that point, the council was responsible for the day-to-day management of the society and, with over 40 members, it was not fit for purpose. By now, the council sits in an advisory capacity only and serves as an important line of communication between members and trustees. The council is responsible for electing trustees, of which there are nine, and they are responsible for the legal compliance, strategic direction and general policy of the society. When each new trustee is appointed, they undergo an induction meeting and training as required. The Chief Executive and his staff are now responsible for the day-to-day management of the society. According to Nigel Pulling, this has made the YAS “leaner and meaner”.

Whilst getting the optimum board or council size is a vital first step to introduce real change to a society, care must be taken not to alienate supporters. As Christopher Riddle, Secretary of the Royal Cornwall Agricultural Association, told me during my interview *“beware of the dangers of disengagement”*. Change is a journey. It takes time. The cartoon on next page illustrates perfectly the challenge of change.

Agricultural societies in the U.K. can sometimes be slow to adapt, but I have been impressed by the progressive and positive steps taken by some to modernise and streamline their operations. The South of England Agricultural Society (SEAS), for example, has undergone a strategic review to create a governance structure which is better aligned to its vision. With ambitious targets to double the income generated from its events centre over the next five years, there was a need to renew the structure which underpins delivery. Using the services of an external consultant who sought views from trustees, staff and council members, a paper was produced outlining some “home truths” and setting a clear agenda to meet their new objectives. It is often true that a crisis can prompt change and, whilst the SEAS was not in crisis, poor financial performance was the driver and according to their Chief Executive Iain Nicol *“it provided a sense of urgency behind the change”*.

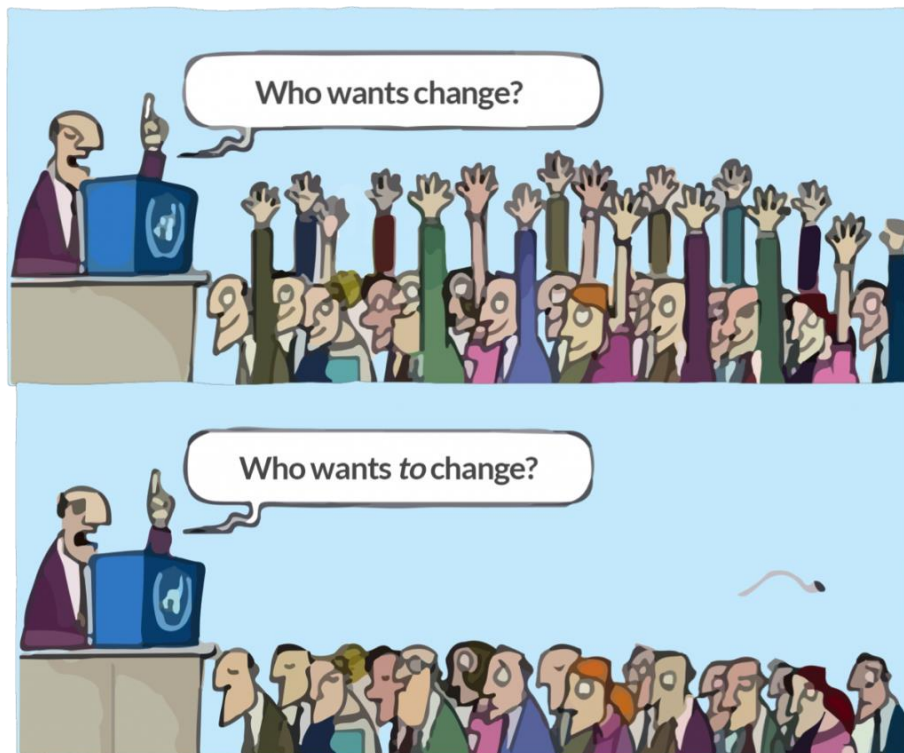


Figure 31: “Who wants (to) change?” cartoon. (Source: Change Activation website)

The “home truths” identified by the consultant goes on to highlight the risks faced by several agricultural societies, such as an overreliance on the show to generate income; too much focus on the show and not on the broader charitable objectives; no longer relevant to active and, in particular, young farmers; lack of event business skills amongst trustees; cumbersome governance; underutilised council and ineffective process; facilities in need of investment; lack of clear direction and financial understanding. Iain Nicol highlighted that *“staff involvement in the process was key”* and *“the governance change has been a huge motivation to the team”*.

One of the outcomes of the review has been to establish a new governance structure and board to the South of England Event Centre Limited, a separate trading subsidiary to SEAS. The board has a maximum of 6 members with at least one from an events background. This introduces the concept of a skills-based board. Each board must have the right balance of skills to complement the strategic direction of the society.

During my interview with Christine Knipe, Chief Executive of Westmorland County Agricultural Society and Chair of ASAO, she had reservations for conducting a skills analysis of her board. She said: *“I am certain if a skills audit were to be undertaken on our Board there would be distinct gaps”* but she did not want to create a board which was too clinical and had no passion. In her view *“the sanitising of a board takes away the soul”*. The typical board member of an agricultural society might not be the type of individual who holds a number of non-executive directorships and is well-versed with the world of corporate governance, trustee responsibility and financial scrutiny. But what they might lack in these ‘corporate skills’, they more than compensate in a genuine passion and desire to



promote farming. Personally, I don't believe that passion and skills are mutually exclusive - you can have both.

Another aspect of effective governance adopted by some societies, but not many, is term limits. At the YAS each trustee is appointed for a term of three years and can serve up to a maximum of nine years. Nigel Pulling said: *"I'm a great believer in rotation. If people cannot make progress through the hierarchy, they disappear. I don't want the impression of a 'closed shop'"*. With similar comments, the Chief Executive of the Bath & West of England Society, Rupert Cox, said: *"historically, active volunteers used to walk in vertical and go out horizontal; recent smart appointments of new trustees at The Royal Bath & West have led to greater ambition and drive for the organisation"*. In my view, turnover is healthy. It can help introduce new ideas and fresh impetus to a board.

To illustrate this, I have prepared the diagram below. Credit must be given to Iain Nicol from SEAS for the original concept and idea.

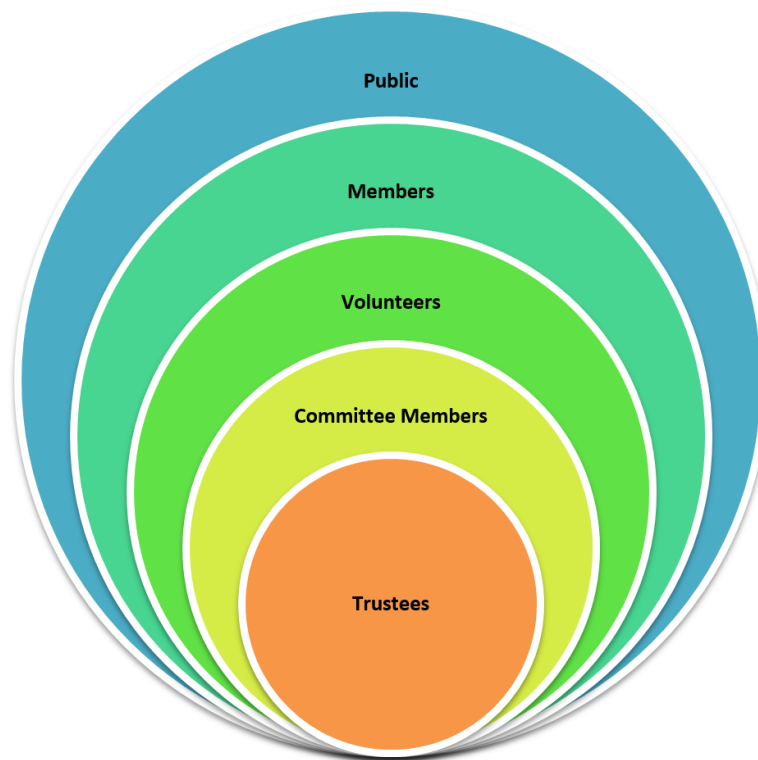


Figure 32: An onion diagram of a charity

Basically, the diagram shows how volunteer and member charities are structured. At its heart are the trustees who have progressed from the outer circles. Some people want an arm's length relationship with a society and are happy to remain as members or volunteers. However, others may want to get more engaged in the society's work and opportunities for those to progress to the core must be made possible. It is also in the charity's interest to promote succession and attract good people to get involved.

This is particularly relevant when it comes to young people. Several agricultural societies in the U.K. and fair organisers in the U.S. have been active on this front. Youth committees have been established in the U.K. and junior fair boards are in existence at many county fairs in the U.S. When I



spoke with John Henning, a Nuffield Farming Scholar from Northern Ireland, he went a step further and said: “you don’t just need a youth committee, you need youth on committees”.

The New Forest Agricultural Show Society has its own Next Generation (NG) programme and, by the end of 2016, it aims to have two members under the age of 40 on every committee. The Show Secretary Denis Dooley, who himself is under 40, said: *“the future of Agricultural Shows depends on the goodwill and passion of knowledgeable volunteers. I strongly feel that this knowledge comes from involvement with both their relevant sector and the Show. Our Next Generation Project centres on bringing two members, under the age of 40, onto every committee and working with the committees to involve them in the Show. I hope that, over time, these members will become the backbone of the Society and bring through their very own Next Generation.”*

In addition, the NG programme sets out to promote further young handler classes in horse and livestock competitions, encourage and support younger judges, actively encourage career opportunities in the agricultural show industry through offering work experience to students, and running educational days, farm visits and an annual debate on topics relevant to the agricultural industry. Similar initiatives have been set up with the Great Yorkshire Show establishing the Future Farmers of Yorkshire group and The Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association forming a network for its young members named YIELD which stands for Young, Innovative, Enterprising, Learning and Developing.

The Future Farmers of Yorkshire has over 700 members and organises two evening meetings each year. All communication is delivered via email and it only requires a low level of commitment, as it recognises the demands on young people’s time. Two members of the Future Farmers of Yorkshire are appointed onto the council for three years to see if they like it. YIELD is a similar network for members aged between 25 and 45 who meet up to six times a year for a mix of social and business events. The group attracts high calibre speakers to address them on matters important to the industry.

According to Charity Commission statistics, the average age of trustees in the U.K. is 57, with 67% aged over 60. Perhaps this is to be expected. Time is precious for young people. They have busy lives, raising families and building careers with limited time to invest. It is understandable that the majority of trustees are from an older age profile as they typically have the time to give. Therefore, I believe societies need to be realistic in their expectations of young people. Opportunities need to exist for people to engage and societies need to sow the seeds for future loyalty.

However, volunteers of all ages play an important role in the running of agricultural societies and shows. Often providing the manpower and ‘the people on the ground’ to run large events, volunteers are integral to maintaining the prosperity of agricultural shows.

Furthermore, fundamental to delivery of all charitable aims is having a dedicated team of staff. Without doubt it is one of the most important resources of any charity. The relationship between a board of trustees and management is very important. In theory, a board makes the policy and the staff put the policy into operation. Sounds simple, but in reality the boundaries are not so well-defined. The old adage of “noses in, fingers out” is often true. Trustees need to have their nose in the business but avoid the temptation of running the business.



Traditionally, trustees of agricultural societies have been very hands-on. And for good reason. They would be made up of individuals who conduct important operational tasks during the annual show, i.e. stewarding and overseeing sections. This might explain how some societies have become so focussed on their show, they've lost sight of their wider aims and objectives. As one fair manager told me: *"when you've got board members talking about broken manholes in your board meetings – you know you've got problems!"*. The Chairman of the RWAS, John T Davies, believes that not getting your strategic governance right is one of the biggest threats to a society and, in his words, *"the directors [trustees] should provide direction and then you should let the professionals put it into action"*.

There has definitely been a shift in expectations of charity trustees. Gone are the days when trustee positions were viewed simply as honorary roles. Recent interest in the way charities operate, particularly following some scandals and negative headlines over the misuse of charitable funds in the U.K., has increased the responsibility of trustees to ensure the charity is held accountable. Ensuring that the board size and composition is effective, together with providing periodic training, is very important. Above all, structures need to be simple, easily understood with clear roles and good communication. Governance does not need to be a big stick. With good structures in place, it can empower people and give them purpose.

Finally, the way charities conduct their business is changing and with developments in technology, it is likely to change further. Who knows, future board meetings might become paperless, virtual video conferencing or even holographic communication? *Sci Fi* might become reality.

5.16. How will technology change the way we do business?

We are living in a digital age. Advances in communication technology have led to a 'digital immersion'. According to the multinational technology giant Cisco, the explosive growth of smartphones and tablet computers has seen a surge in the number of devices connected to the internet. In 2010, the number of devices reached 12.5 billion which exceeded the global population of 6.8 billion for the very first time. By 2020, Cisco predicts that the number of connected devices per person will reach 6.58.

Coupled with this surge in devices there has been a gigantic increase in data. According to IBM, we create 2.5 quintillion bytes of data each day. So much, in fact, that 90% of the world's data has been created in the last two years alone. This data is created from posts on social media sites, increased use of mobile apps, digital pictures, videos, e-commerce and mobile networks etc.

What has been the impact for shows? It has led to an explosion of mobile traffic which has placed considerable pressure on network capacity. I can speak from experience as, up until relatively recently, the Royal Welsh Show suffered from frequent collapse of the mobile service due to overloading and the lack of capacity within the network. This has significant ramifications on the visitor experience at the event and is particularly detrimental to exhibitors who attend for business and trading purposes.

Therefore, the RWAS identified mobile connectivity as a key strategic priority. Having worked closely with the Welsh Government and BT Openreach, the RWAS successfully secured a fast-tracked roll



out of superfast broadband to the showground with a new 80MB fibre-optic connection, with an option to upgrade to 330MB, as part of the Superfast Cymru programme. Works were completed in early 2014 and provided the essential infrastructure to improve the showground connectivity. Internet speeds improved and it was a key influential factor in persuading one of the U.K.'s leading mobile operators, EE, to invest in a permanent mast on the showground.

Having been involved in lengthy and, at times, intense negotiations, the RWAS granted a 20-year lease to EE and the mast was completed only a few days in advance of the 2016 Royal Welsh Show. Keen to future-proof all projects, the RWAS also insisted that the infrastructure was capable of supporting all spectrums including 2G, 3G and 4G (and potentially 5G). The Welsh Government was instrumental in supporting this project to deliver what has been described as “the highest capacity single site outside of London”: a real achievement for a showground located in deepest darkest Mid Wales. The Welsh Minister for Skills and Science, Julie James AM, said *“Both I and my officials maintain regular contact with the major mobile network operators to discuss their operations and future plans for Wales and how the Welsh Government can facilitate further roll-out”*. The efforts of Peter Gwyn Williams, Technical Relationships Manager at the Welsh Government, have been instrumental in realising the RWAS’s ambition to enable the Royal Welsh showground to become the best connected rural site in Europe.



Figure 33: The permanent EE Mast craned into position on the Royal Welsh Showground (June 2016)

Another key component for creating a well-connected site is Wi-Fi. Wireless internet access is no longer considered a luxury, it is a necessity. Not only coffee shops are offering free public Wi-Fi, large sections of city centres are also starting to offer this connectivity. From an event perspective, technology and Wi-Fi play an increasing role in marketing, sales of e-tickets and admission control, allowing card payments, communications, data gathering and visitor engagement. The list is endless.

Having a Wi-Fi backbone across a site could really push the boundaries of what’s possible in running agricultural shows and making showgrounds more attractive as event centres. In particular, the



gathering of 'big data' can turn information into valuable intelligence. Data analytics are already used by many trade shows, exhibitions and technical events. The data is used to improve exhibitor engagement, prove the value of sponsorships, increase attendance and repeat booking rates, assess visitor flows, and help to grow an event.

Whilst traditional visitor questionnaires and exit surveys are commonplace throughout many shows and fairs, advances in technology can unlock even greater intelligence which can assist future decision making. For example, Wi-Fi supported analytics can capture real-time data on the number of visitors per hour to a particular section/area, average dwell times, visitor return rate, the most popular stands and poor performers, visitor movement, flow maps, average speeds and potential congestion areas, location quality with percentage of visitor passage - and the list goes on. All this data can assist organisers to respond dynamically to situations which need addressing during an event. It also can offer valuable evidence to support decisions on whether to amend the layout of an event to encourage better flow of people, where to put additional services and basic amenities and even provide proof to justify premium stand prices in the most popular locations. This data could also be used to measure KPIs and create new measures of success to replace the outdated assessment of attendance figures.

Furthermore, technology is changing the way we market events and venues. Digital marketing in highly sophisticated and social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are capturing data on their users' preferences in order to push related adverts to their attention. It can sometimes be a bit unnerving to think we are living in a 'big brother' world where your behavioural patterns are being constantly monitored. There is even a huge debate on the ownership of data. Companies profit from the sale of data and there is even a 'value' in capturing email addresses to target campaigns and repeat sales etc.

Nevertheless, digital innovation is a powerful tool in marketing. Gone are the days of simply creating billboard posters, newspaper adverts and brochures. Modern marketing strategies are experimenting with apps, creating mobile compatible content, videos and virtual reality on the back of intelligence targeting and analytics. To demonstrate the reach of digital marketing and, in particular, social media platforms, when the RWAS posted the picture in Figure 33 on Facebook with the caption: "Permanent EE mast currently being installed at the showground. We'll have 4G all year round!" within only a few hours it was shared 104 times, received 623 likes and seen by over 40,000 people. The challenge is to get the right blend of technology with traditional marketing, whilst keeping updated with emerging trends.

Case Study

Humans of the Royal Welsh Show

The 'Humans of the Royal Welsh Show' project was the brainchild of Greg Thomas, a PhD researcher in the Department of Geography and Earth Sciences at Aberystwyth University. As a part of his research project entitled 'Agricultural Shows: Driving and Displaying Rural Change', he decided to capture live blogs



telling the stories of the ordinary, and the extraordinary, people involved with the Royal Welsh Show.

The project was inspired by the success of ‘Humans of New York’, which is a collection of street portraits and interviews of people going about their day at New York City. Started by Brandon Stanton in November 2010, it has achieved a huge following on social media with over 16 million followers on Facebook and 4.7 million followers on Instagram as of January 2016.

So far, over 60 people have been profiled in these blogs, which have received 1,455 ‘likes’ from 21 countries. The Facebook page has been uniquely viewed by 197,990 people from 84 countries, as of August 2015. The response has been staggering and Greg Thomas said: *“for some the Royal Welsh Show is a week of work, for others it is a week of play. For many it is an annual day out, and for competitors the Show is a consolidation of almost a year’s worth of work. Every visitor to the Show has their own story, a different story with the Royal Welsh Show being the common factor, bringing them together in a celebration of all that is great about agriculture and Wales”*.



Figure 34: Profile of Dee Rees – one of the ‘Humans of the Royal Welsh Show’

This project has highlighted the range of backgrounds and roles people play in the running of an agricultural show. It has also showcased the work of those volunteers who work diligently with little recognition or reward. Using the power of social media it has not only allowed Greg Thomas to conduct his research, it has also provided valuable digital marketing for the event.

The risks of not keeping up-to-date with trends can have catastrophic results, as the RASE learnt with the loss of its Royal Show. Technology companies have also suffered from complacency. Who can remember the Nokia phone? Nokia dominated the 1990s with little competition from any other rival. But it went from market domination with 40% of the global market share in 2006 to a complete




stop in the production of handsets in less than 10 years. Complacency and lack of innovation was commonly blamed for the demise. In 2007, the Apple iPhone was released, a great example of ‘disruptive innovation’. The iPhone had a huge impact on the industry and led the smartphone revolution. A phone is no longer just a phone – it is your camera, your diary, your wallet, your Outlook for emails, your information source for everything from the weather to your personal health and wellbeing. Nokia failed to make the transition and adapt its products to changing market demands and ultimately failed. This puts into sharp focus the perils of resisting change.

In future, the most influential consumer group and key drivers for change will be Millennials. Also known as Generation Y, millennials are described as those with birth years ranging from 1980 to around 2000. They will be the next generation of key stakeholders for agricultural societies – including employees, visitors, members and future leaders. The millennial generation has seen rapid change and will have very different expectations and behavioural patterns to previous generations. Described as “digital natives”, millennials have an affinity with technology and conduct a lot of their retail purchases online. Social media is hugely influential in their buying decisions and they are used to accessing instant product information and price comparison. They possess different attitudes towards ownership and are reluctant to buy cars, music and luxury goods. Health and wellbeing is important to them and they spend money on exercising and maintaining a healthy diet.

The modern thinking and actions of millennials will impact the way agricultural societies and shows communicate in future. There is no doubt that technology will play an increasingly important role in every facet of work and societies must embrace this opportunity. In an industry which is very good at tradition, now is the time to get ahead of the curve. Don’t fall into the trap of listening to the old adage “that’s the way we’ve always done it”. Change is always easier when it’s done collectively and the industry needs bodies that will show leadership and equip show and fair organisers to excel in the digital age.

5.17. Get yourself an umbrella - organisation I mean

An umbrella organisation represents the interests of its members. They are effective bodies which provide opportunities for networking, sharing of information and advice, training and government lobbying. During my travels, I met both members and leaders of several umbrella organisations of agricultural shows and below are four case studies highlighting their work.

<p>Case Study</p> <p>Association of Show & Agricultural Organisations</p>	
<p>The Association of Show and Agricultural Organisations represents over 200 U.K. societies and organisations linked to agriculture, horticulture, equine and countryside events. The membership ranges from local one-day events to major four-day national shows. Collectively they organise over 400 show days the ASAO describes itself as the “<i>voice of the British agricultural show industry</i>”.</p>	



Members benefit from access to advice on everything from legislation, health and safety, insurance, marketing and best practice together with the opportunity to network with other show organisers at various learning days, annual conference and regional meetings.

Case Study

The European Federation of Agricultural Exhibition and Show Organisers



The European Federation of Agricultural Exhibition and Show Organisers (EURASCO) was established in 1966 with the aim of promoting European shows through the exchange of information, ideas, experience, reciprocal advice, liaison and mutual assistance. In 2016, it celebrated its 50th anniversary during its AGM held at Fieragricola – an international agricultural technologies show in Verona, Italy. It currently has 31 members from 21 European countries and members meet once a year.

Case Study

Royal Agricultural Societies of the Commonwealth



The Royal Agricultural Societies of the Commonwealth (RASC) was founded in 1957 by its Patron HRH The Duke of Edinburgh KG KT. Today it represents 60 member societies from 25 commonwealth countries. Aimed to encourage the interchange of information and ideas between member societies, it holds a biennial conference to provide opportunities for member societies to network and explore matters of mutual interest. Representing such a diverse range of organisations, its objectives also include promoting agricultural education and expertise in countries in need of agricultural development. Since 2004, the RASC has held a dedicated conference to Next Generation (NG) members. The NG forum brings together people under the age of 40 from all across the commonwealth with a common interest and encourages future leaders.



Case Study

International Association of Fairs & Expositions (IAFE)



The International Association of Fairs and Expositions (IAFE) is a not-for-profit organisation established in 1885. Based in Springfield, Missouri, it represents state, provincial, regional and county agricultural fairs, shows, exhibitions and expositions. The IAFE represents 1,100 fairs and events around the world, and more than 900 members from allied fields. The purpose of IAFE is to promote the development and improvement of agricultural events; and members' benefits include the ability to attend management conferences, technical seminars, structured training, regional meetings and the annual convention. The convention is the largest single event organised by the IAFE and is currently held in Las Vegas. Attracting around 5,000 delegates, it is by far the largest conference of its type specifically aimed at agricultural show and fair organisers.

Establishing connections with other societies and organisations is an essential part of maintaining knowledge and keeping abreast of new developments and trends. The practice of knowledge sharing in an open and non-competitive environment has the effect of raising the performance of all member societies. With event management becoming increasingly regulated and the nature of commercial trading undertaken on showgrounds and fairgrounds becoming more diverse, there is a growing need to share information and best practice.

The skills required in this modern, global and digital age is changing. Proper training is therefore essential. I am not aware of any U.K. university or college offering courses on agricultural show management, nor are there any professional qualifications for show managers in the U.K. I was therefore very interested to learn of the work of the IAFE (International Association of Fairs and Expositions) and the Institute of Fair Management (IFM) it established in 2007. The IFM was created to enhance the professional development of fair employees and volunteers. It has a structured curriculum of 36 courses which run over two years offering training on a range of topics including finance, insurance, human resources, health and safety, emergency planning, regulation and compliance, budgeting, advertising, public relations, crisis communications, agriculture, education, competitive exhibits, facilities management, food and beverage, carnival midway (funfair rides) management, commercial trade exhibits, contract negotiation and best practice, sponsorship and ethics. Simply listing these topics makes you realise the range of skills required for the modern show and fair manager and how versatile they need to be. The courses are held all over the USA and some are also offered as webinars.

Whilst all courses are mandatory, one third are offered through a webinar format. The IAFE conducted a lot of research before embarking on this institute and explored similar courses offered in the event management industry. The IFM uses the Harvard Business School case method whereby participants are forced to adopt decision-making roles in a hypothetical case. It has proven to be a



powerful learning tool and encourages leadership and interaction between other members within their peer group.

The IAFE also administers a very prestigious certification scheme where fair employees can earn the designation of Certified Fair Executive (CFE) and volunteer members can become Certified Volunteer Fair Manager (CVFM). The scheme recognises excellence and is based on a detailed criteria and thorough application process. By having both structured training under the IFM and a certification scheme, the IAFE can promote the professionalism of its industry. In turn, this maintains the trust, respect and reputation of its members.

There are opportunities for U.K. based umbrella organisations to learn from this training programme and engage in greater dialogue with other bodies representing the event management industry. Furthermore, consideration could be given to developing an international exchange programme to encourage greater sharing of information and ideas and to grow future leaders. With the challenges facing agricultural societies and shows on all levels - from local, county, regional to national - developing good people is key.



6. Conclusions

1. Agricultural societies were established in the U.K. during the late 18th century to promote agricultural progress. Agricultural shows emerged as a principal means of fulfilling the charitable aims of those societies by promoting best practice in the breeding of livestock and crop production through the application of science and technology.
2. Whilst the founding aims and objectives of societies to promote agriculture are still relevant today, the way in which those charitable aims are fulfilled is changing. The sole focus is no longer on disseminating the latest farming techniques to farmers and providing knowledge transfer; it is more consumer focussed given the increasingly diverse audience at shows.
3. The visitor profile at shows within the U.K., U.S. and Australia highlight a rising proportion of visitors who are not directly employed in agriculture and come from non-farming backgrounds. This changing demographic is an opportunity for societies and shows to facilitate the interaction between the 'producer' and the 'consumer' with a view of informing a growing urban audience on food production. Consequently, there has been a shift in focus of shows with greater emphasis on fostering public relations and creating a positive image of agriculture.
4. Fairs in the U.S. see their role as informing the public about agriculture and food production given the decline in the farming population. The level of resources they dedicate towards providing education at their events far surpasses any U.K. equivalent. Terms such as 'edutainment' and 'agritainment' are widely used in the U.S. to describe the provision of education through entertainment.
5. Tradition and heritage are central to the identity of agricultural societies and shows. Organisers need to maintain the core values and 'essence' of their event, given the important cultural and social function they serve, but they must constantly innovate to remain fresh.



6. An agricultural society is more than just a show – and people need to know about it. Agricultural societies must have clarity on their charitable aims and the different ways in which they are delivered, over and above their annual show. Societies must communicate their purpose and, in addition to telling people what they do, they must tell people why they do it. People are one of the most important assets to any charity, from staff to volunteers, and clear communication is key to maintaining public support.
7. Whilst most agricultural societies are charities, they must still act and think like businesses in order to remain financially viable. For the majority of societies, the running of their annual show is a net cost to their budgets and therefore commercial trading activity is required to provide the necessary enabling finance.
8. The challenges facing agricultural societies and shows include: remaining relevant to progressive farmers; appealing to young people; streamlining governance structures to enable greater engagement and turnover; creating effective committee structures; continuing financial viability; securing sufficient ‘enabling finance’; obtaining the necessary skills amongst trustees; the threat of technical events and declining agricultural content at shows; weather; disease; security; increased regulation; future sustainability of small local shows; loss of public support and credibility; maintaining trust and reputation; inability and being slow to embrace change and reluctance to adopt new technologies.
9. The opportunities available to agricultural societies and shows include: engaging in educational initiatives; maintaining the positive image of farming; inspiring consumer confidence; raising the profile of the agriculture to a growing urban audience; promoting the highest standards of animal welfare; biosecurity and disease control; utilising technology to enhance visitor experience at shows and to capture valuable data; embracing digital media for modern marketing and promotion; diversifying out-of-show income streams; exploring new and innovative ways to deliver charitable aims; increasing communication and member loyalty; developing future leaders; sharing information and best practice with other organisations and promoting U.K. agriculture to the world post-Brexit.



7. Recommendations

1. Agricultural societies must have a clear strategic plan on how they intend to deliver their charitable aims in future.
2. Governance structures need to be fit for purpose in order to underpin the strategic agenda with clear opportunities for people to progress, particularly young people, to the hierarchy of societies with term limits and appropriate skills in trustee appointments.
3. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on how agricultural societies deliver their charitable aims outside of their annual show, and better communication is required to highlight the work that takes place throughout the year.
4. Societies need to be clear on their purpose, capture their charitable work and communicate regularly with their members and the public to grow loyalty and support.
5. Agricultural societies must create strong fiscal platforms through diversifying their income streams and reducing show income as proportion of their overall turnover.
6. Showground assets and facilities need to be used to their full potential and should be promoted as places open for business all year round.
7. More focus and resources need to be placed on delivering education to the public and children on the importance of farming and food production.
8. Show organisers should explore ways of informing and engaging their non-farming audience about agriculture through the use of entertainment.
9. Consideration could be given to making livestock competitions more of a spectacle.
10. Shows need to consider ways of introducing more performance-based and commercially-focussed livestock competitions in order to remain relevant to progressive farmers.



11. An industry-wide code of ethics needs to be introduced to ensure the highest standards of animal welfare at shows are maintained and to negate any adverse publicity.
12. Agricultural societies could explore the possibilities of introducing more out-of-show competitions covering all agricultural sectors and promoting knowledge exchange through open days and masterclass sessions with winners.
13. Agricultural shows should support the development of young judges and explore the possibility of working with the Young Farmers Clubs and breed societies to create an academy programme to develop judges of the future.
14. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on effective reason-giving by judges and commentary at shows, whilst remembering to be relevant to both farming and non-farming audiences.
15. Societies and shows need to enhance their use of technology and embrace digital marketing.
16. Greater use of Wi-Fi supported analytics could be made at shows to capture valuable data, demonstrate return on investment to sponsors and justify premium stand prices in most popular locations.
17. Greater creativity in designing sponsorship packages could be adopted to unlock new revenue opportunities.
18. Show organisers need to explore different Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and create new measures of success for their events and move away from relying solely on the outdated assessment of attendance figures.
19. Surveys should be conducted regularly to identify trends, visitor preferences and to measure the effectiveness of shows in increasing visitor knowledge about agriculture.
20. Agricultural shows need to capitalise on the prominence of food culture and be aware of changing consumer habits towards health and wellbeing. Shows have an



opportunity to champion local, regional and national food whilst connecting consumers with producers.

21. Agricultural societies need to plan their future succession and provide greater opportunities for young people to get involved. Digital technology should be used more widely to communicate in the form of emails, social media, real-time video conferencing and live streaming.
22. Larger show societies must proactively support their grassroots through sharing information and best practice with smaller regional and local shows.
23. Umbrella organisations such as the ASAO could offer structured training to show organisers and volunteers and introduce professionally recognised qualifications.
24. Greater international links could be established between agricultural societies and shows and an international exchange programme could be established by umbrella organisations to provide further sharing of information and staff development opportunities.



9. After my study tour

Nuffield Farming Scholarships have been described to me as a gift that keeps on giving. Since completing my travels, I have been overwhelmed by the interest shown in my report and I have many speaking engagements lined up over the next few months. In October, I will address the biennial conference of the Royal Agricultural Societies of the Commonwealth to be held in Singapore. In addition, I have been invited to speak at the AGM of the Farmers Union of Wales, the AGM of the South of England Agricultural Society and a number of other discussion groups.

By sharing the findings of my Scholarship, I hope to offer some guidance and provoke new thinking in the agricultural show industry together with promoting the Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust. When I set out on my studies, I wanted to produce a report that any agricultural society in the world could pick up and find useful. Despite the many cultural, political and regulatory differences across the countries I visited, there are many themes contained in my report which are relevant to all.

On a UK level, the outcome of the referendum in June and the decision to part company with the European Union and the single market will see a significant restructuring of the industry. Global competitiveness and trade deals will be increasingly important and agricultural societies have a golden opportunity to position themselves in this new agenda, thus reinforcing their relevance and commitment to the industry.

I am fortunate to hold a senior position within the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society and will continue to work with all umbrella organisations, including the ASAO, RASC and IAFE, to raise the profile of agricultural societies and shows. Each organisation has much to offer in developing young people and the skills sets required to thrive in a modern digital world. In particular, I would like to see greater international collaboration and opportunities for structured exchange programmes for both organisers and volunteers.

In the spirit of Nuffield Farming, travel broadens the mind and I want others to benefit from the experiences I have gained.



10. Executive summary

Agricultural societies and shows have played a leading role in the development of agriculture and the rural economy for over two centuries. Originally established to promote best practice in the breeding of livestock and crop production through the application of science and technology, today their role covers a far greater spectrum of farming and rural life.

Whilst the charitable aims of agricultural societies remain relevant today, the way in which these aims are fulfilled is changing. Agriculture is facing a significant period of change with global commodity market volatility becoming the norm. Therefore, societies face a challenge to evolve in step with the industry whilst remaining relevant to an increasingly diverse audience.

Where do we go from here was the key question I set out to answer.

My study therefore focussed on establishing the principal functions of agricultural societies and shows, comparing their relevance to modern farming, understanding how their charitable aims are delivered, exploring the relationship between 'the society' and 'the show' and highlighting the challenges and opportunities.

I conducted the majority of my research on shows and fairs across the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The visitor profile on both sides of the Atlantic highlights a rising proportion of visitors who are not directly employed in agriculture and from non-farming backgrounds. This changing demographic is an opportunity for societies and shows to facilitate the interaction between the 'producer' and the 'consumer' with a view to informing a growing urban audience about food production. Consequently, there has been a shift in the focus of shows with greater emphasis on fostering public relations and creating a positive image of agriculture.

The image of agriculture is often associated with tradition and heritage and show organisers need to maintain the core values which are central to their identity, given the important cultural and social function they serve. But they must constantly innovate to remain fresh.

Furthermore, a society is more than just a show – and people need to know about it. Communicating the purpose of societies is essential and, in addition to telling people what they do, societies must remember to tell people why they do it.

The principle challenges that face societies include maintaining financial viability, avoiding cumbersome and ineffective governance structures, remaining relevant to young and progressive farmers, and securing public support. The opportunities, on the other hand, include: informing the wider public about farming and food production, diversifying income streams, dedicating more resources to delivering educational initiatives, introducing more commercially focussed livestock competitions, embracing technology, data analytics and digital marketing, together with establishing links with international counterparts to share information and develop future leaders.

Agricultural societies and shows play an important role within the industry and have a bright future ahead. To make the most of the opportunities outlined above and to establish a future direction, societies will need to invest in people, assets and technology to ensure strong financial stability which is essential to deliver and communicate their charitable work.

Aled Rhys Jones. July 2016



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12. Appendix A

The global balance of power is shifting to Asia

The growing affluence of Asia will have a major impact on global agriculture. Not a revelation, I know, but in March 2015, I travelled to China, Hong Kong and Singapore on an intense two-week agribusiness tour and witnessed it for myself.

What hits you in the face when you travel around China is the sheer scale of development occurring in the major cities and the determination of the government to drive large infrastructure projects through. The urbanisation policy of China has driven mass migration from rural areas to the cities and now the country boasts over 180 cities with a population of over three million.

There is a growing disparity between the urban areas and the rural hinterland, but the continued urbanisation flow has prompted a growth in the Chinese middle class, estimated to be in the region of 300 million which is equivalent to almost a quarter of the country's population. China's population is forecast to peak at 1.5 billion by 2030, double that of Europe!

What does a growing middle class mean? An increase in disposable income and a shift in consumption patterns towards a high protein diet. You could clearly detect a westernisation occurring and a significant demand was predicted for red meat, particularly beef. Staggeringly, beef imports are estimated to reach five million tonnes within five years.

Food security is therefore high on the political agenda but long term self-sufficiency for all commodities is an unlikely aspiration. Whilst effort is being made to increase the productivity of Chinese agriculture, there remain some significant barriers to overcome including limited amount of cultivable land (only 15%), limited water supply and quality, lack of consumer confidence and a fragmented land management rights system. If any nation has the ingenuity to innovate a solution, then it's China. However, in the meantime, reliance on imports will remain.

The challenge for the government is to strike a balance between protecting the domestic agricultural industry, which is currently at a competitive disadvantage on efficiency, cost of production and public perception compared to other countries, and source a secure supply of foreign food to satisfy the growing consumer demand.

The Chinese government is keen to develop the skills set of its farmers and offers a technical support service, including seminars, field demonstration days and on-farm advisors. There is not a tradition of agricultural shows as we know them, but there is an emergence of technical trade exhibitions, normally led by the government where farmers are specifically invited to attend. I spent some time with a British couple living in Hong Kong who were importing seed drills into China on the back of an increased mechanisation of farming practices. They explained the challenges of trading in China and that achieving government support was key to any success.

What also struck me amid the need to produce more was the lack of confidence by the Chinese people in their domestic products. The milk scandal of 2008 where powdered baby milk was found to contain dangerously high levels of the chemical melamine struck a massive blow to the industry, which they are yet to fully recover from. Foreign imports, particularly from New Zealand and



Australia, therefore carry a far better perception of being cleaner, greener and safer amongst the Chinese people.

There is still some way to go to restore confidence in domestic food supplies and the tightening up of food safety regulations was very apparent. This has really highlighted to me the importance of communication with the consumer, a role which agricultural shows do so well. It is sometimes difficult to quantify the positive engagement achieved by shows, but when you see the lasting impact a food scandal can have on an industry, this role becomes ever more important.

Perhaps shows can also offer a platform to conduct international trade talks? In a meeting with the Australian Embassy in Beijing, I was most impressed by their proactive approach which led to a successful negotiation of a Free Trade Agreement with China. Discussions commenced in 2005 and went through 21 rounds of negotiation before the agreement was finally completed.

Having visited several wholesalers and importers, I gained an insight into the volume and diverse range of products Australia exports to China.

With all the positive demographic indicators so widely talked about in the press and media, competition for market share is fierce. Indicators suggest that as incomes rise, spending on food also rises, which is contrary to the pattern seen in other developed countries. Interestingly, China has over 800 five star hotels and a big culture of eating out. More and more multinationals are investing and locating in Asia, including Nestlé where we visited their new Dairy Farming Institute in Harbin, northern China.

There are almost too many meetings and visits to mention in this report, but I must acknowledge the excellent work of Nuffield Australia in arranging meetings and access to both individuals and businesses which, ordinarily, would never be possible. I met farmers, growers, importers, wholesalers, industry experts, bankers, manufactures, processors, to name just a few, and was hosted by several government officials: an unforgettable couple of weeks.

Everywhere we went we received an excellent reception and the Chinese were all polite, humble and friendly people. The importance of creating strong relationships was made very clear to us and their unique culture has certainly left an impression on me. I was introduced to the term “Guanxi”, used to describe trusted business relations. “Guanxi” is a central philosophy in Chinese society used in both a personal and business sense and is based on the principles of mutual trust and reciprocity.

It is refreshing to learn that people still have a strong connection with the land, and during the Chinese New Year people flock back to rural areas to celebrate with their families. Described as the world’s largest population displacement, it is said that the 22 million population of Beijing reduces to just seven million during this annual festival.

Finally, my preconceptions on China have changed. China is not one country and one market place: it’s a collection of a number of ethnic groups with huge diversity from east to west, from north to south. With a continuous culture for over 4,000 years, China has a rich history. It invented paper, discovered Pi and was the first to start mapping the sky. Understanding and respecting their culture will be key to unlocking future market opportunities.