

Effective leadership, management and development of people working in agriculture and agri-food: supporting new entrants from non-agricultural backgrounds

PROJECT OVERVIEW, TEACHING RESOURCES & CASE STUDIES

Author: Claire Toogood

Funded by: The Farmers Club Charitable Trust



Acknowledgements

Thank you to The Farmers Club Charitable Trust who funded this research project through an Agricultural Educator Award. Thank you to all the survey participants, interviewees, and all the other colleagues and individuals who gave their time, experience, and knowledge to this project.

Publication date: February 2023



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

Contents

Introduction to the project	1
How to use these resources	1
Overview of the current agricultural and agri-food workforce	2
Overview of leadership, management and employee development	4
Overview of research project and key findings	6
Project outline	6
Key findings	6
Project case studies	8
1. The self-employed small flock manager - Stormur Normannsson	9
2. From teaching to teaching farming to managing food sustainability - Ben Williams	11
3. A life changing placement - Jodie Littleford	13
4. Two careers, one dream - Matt Latham	15
5. Discovering agriculture in Australia - Maisie Wildgoose	17
6. The "Grower to Grocer" trainee - Shan Li Ng	19

SECTION 1

Introduction to the project

The case studies and teaching resources provided in this document were created as part of a research project reviewing the experiences of new entrants from non-agricultural backgrounds working in agriculture and agri-food. The project focused on leadership, management and employee development, in order to evaluate and establish effective practice, and support sustainable staffing and retention in agriculture and agri-food.

The complete project with full references can be found at: tfctt.co.uk/read-our-fcct-reports & harper.ac.uk/FCCTReport

How to use these resources

Each of the overview sections can be used as a guide or background information, and collectively they act as a brief summary of the research project. However, each overview also has suggested activities, which allow it to be used as a teaching resource, either in class, or as a preparation activity for class discussions. The suggested activities are not overly prescriptive, in order to allow educators to adapt the level of any discussion or activity to suit their learners. The suggested activities are also generally designed to be open to students at a range of levels, and from a variety of backgrounds.

Each case study introduces one individual and their journey and experiences in agriculture or agri-food. Suggested activities are then linked to their experience, focusing on a related topic, or topics. Again, there is flexibility in the suggested activities to

allow the educator to use the case studies in the manner that best suits their learners. References are included as weblinks for educators and classes, and are accurate as at December 2022.



SECTION 2

Overview of the current agricultural and agri-food workforce

In 2021, 4 million UK jobs were attributed to the agri-food industry, or just over 13% of all workforce employment in the UK¹. Within this, the agricultural workforce numbered 467,000 individuals in 2021². Agri-food encompasses agriculture itself along with "related up- and down-stream activities in input supply, food logistics, food processing, retail, and food services"³.

However, there are concerning recruitment issues in agriculture and agri-food^{4,5}. The House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee has acknowledged the scale of the issue, both in terms of widespread problems, but also key "pinch points" in crop picking and harvesting, meat production and processing, poultry, and food processing⁶. These issues have the potential to limit the viability of UK food and farming in the longer term, and damage the mental health and wellbeing of those currently working in the sector. Almost half (49%) of UK food growers and manufacturers have rationalised or reduced their output due to labour shortages⁷.

There is a recognised need to increase the number of people with the desire, drive and ambition to enter the sector, and work is underway to support this. Newly recruited workers will need to be appropriately supported to ensure they are retained, and that they are able to develop satisfying and rewarding careers in agriculture and agri-food. Effective leadership and management have a key role to play in supporting employee retention and can



support the attractiveness of agricultural and agri-food careers, as well as future food security.

Specific staffing challenges exist across agriculture and agri-food. These are summarised in the sections below:

Limited public awareness of the career opportunities that exist in agriculture and agri-food

A 2022 survey of 10,000 working age people in the UK found only 22% would consider working in food production, agriculture or animal care⁸. A McDonalds UK and Ireland report found that 60% of young people did not see farming as a viable career choice, with 75% of respondents saying that they did not know enough about the industry to consider it as a potential career path⁹.

Misconception that an agricultural background is needed to work in agriculture or agri-food

The idea persists that farming and growing are passed down through generations¹⁰, and not accessible to newcomers. While it can be more difficult for newcomers to gain work experience and access land, educational providers, sector employers, professional bodies, charities and other organisations are working to offer opportunities to help anyone who is interested to gain relevant experience and qualifications to develop their career in agriculture and agri-food.

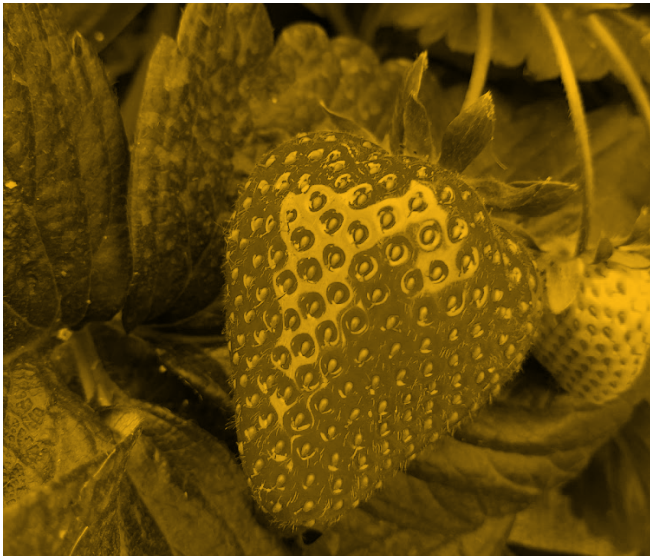
Outdated public views on the skills, pay and location of agricultural and agri-food work

There is a continuing public misconception that agriculture and agri-food roles are exclusively lowly skilled and low paid^{4,5}. Although an average salary figure would not be meaningful due to regional variations and different elements of reward e.g. accommodation, vehicles, and shift allowances, graduate salaries in agriculture and agri-food are comparable to those in other sectors¹¹. There is also a dated public perception that agricultural and agri-food roles only exist in rural areas¹⁰. These misconceptions persist, despite sector work to address this.

Diversity and inclusivity concerns

Farmers topped the "least diverse occupations" in a Policy Exchange report, with 0.03% ethnic diversity¹², and the heteronormative family farm model has shaped both gender

and sexual dynamics in farming¹³. However, work is underway to address the factors that limit diversity¹⁴. Agriculture and agri-food would benefit from creating more diverse and inclusive workplaces which bring multiple benefits, including better decision-making and innovation, increased profits, and enhancements to reputation, talent pool and retention¹⁵.



Suggested activities

- 1 Pick one of the specific challenges. What could each of the following groups or organisations do to help resolve this challenge?
 - A farm with a farm shop.
 - A large agricultural employer.
 - A UK college or university with courses relating to agriculture and agri-food.
 - A sector body, like the National Farmers Union, or the Food and Drink Federation.
- 2 The information above explains that almost half (49%) of UK food growers and manufacturers have rationalised or reduced their output due to labour shortages. What are the potential impacts of this decision:
 - for the UK?
 - for the agriculture and agri-food sector?
 - for individual employers?

¹ [gov.uk/government/statistics/agriculture-in-the-united-kingdom-2021/chapter-14-the-food-chain#agri-food-sector-employees-and-self-employed-farmers](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/agriculture-in-the-united-kingdom-2021/chapter-14-the-food-chain#agri-food-sector-employees-and-self-employed-farmers)

² researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9665/CBP-9665.pdf

³ elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/book/10.1596/33704

⁴ foodresearch.org.uk/publications/review-of-labour-trends-uk-food-manufacturing/

⁵ socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/research/microsites/centreforruralpolicyresearch/pdfs/researchreports/Farm_labour_in_the_UK_Accessing_the_workforce_the_industry_needs_.pdf

⁶ publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5802/cmselect/cmenvfru/713/report.html

⁷ labourproviders.org.uk/resources/addressing-uk-food-industry-labour-shortages/

⁸ www.cityandguilds.com/-/media/cityandguilds-site/documents/news/2022/great-jobs-research-feb-2022-pdf

⁹ www.fginsight.com/news/news/mcdonalds-focus-on-increasing-diversity-and-encouraging-agricultural-careers-128864

¹⁰ tiah.org/research/fky-2022/

¹¹ luminate.prospects.ac.uk/graduate-salaries-in-the-uk

¹² policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/The-two-sides-of-diversity-2.pdf

¹³ www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/08941920.2019.1610626

¹⁴ static1.squarespace.com/static/5eece00ee6780d38b9fb012f/t/63b599ddb28c5936edc62cff/1672845804758/Jumping+Fences+2023+Web.pdf

¹⁵ www.fdf.org.uk/globalassets/resources/publications/reports/dfd-inclusion-diversity-report-2021.pdf

Acknowledgements: Author and Photography: Claire Toogood **Design:** James Armstrong
Research supported by The Farmers Club Charitable Trust Agricultural Educator Award 2021
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.



SECTION 3

Overview of leadership, management and employee development

Across all UK businesses, employers need employees with managerial and leadership skills¹⁶ and recognise that shortages exist in this area¹⁷. Agriculture and agri-food employers have the same issues, improvements in managerial and leadership skills are needed to enhance employee wellbeing, and develop business performance and employee retention^{18,19,20,21}.

Less than 35% of farmers have any formal management training²², and limited management skills among senior staff affect staff satisfaction and retention in agriculture²⁰. In contrast, managerial roles in food have better access to training than other roles²³, but management and leadership is still a key skills gap, leading to "difficult to fill" roles¹⁹. "Accidental managers" are common in agriculture and agri-food, where individuals move into a management role without any training or preparation for what the role might involve, and how to be effective²⁴.

Common themes emerge in discussion around leadership and management, and what each entail. It is generally agreed that a leader tends to set direction and drive change, while a manager implements processes, systems and structures to underpin this. In practice, there can be considerable overlap, especially in small businesses. Leadership is also seen as a quality, albeit one that can be learned and developed; you can act as a leader from

any position in an organisation. Management, can be a position, a set of responsibilities allocated to an individual. However, "in order to be an effective leader or manager, improvement in both is necessary and unavoidable."²⁵. Leaders and managers also create and maintain the environment in which employee development takes place. This may involve other people such as colleagues and mentors.

Evidence-based practice on approaches, behaviours and environments that support and develop new entrants are summarised on the opposite page. This summary focuses on evidence with specific relevance to the case studies and this project.

Suggested activities

- 1 Imagine that after a skills audit you identify that the majority of managers in your organisation are "accidental managers". What training, development and support could you provide to them to help them in their roles, and how would you go about putting this in place? What further factors might you need to consider?
- 2 Read either:
"Work Motivation: An evidence review" (Wietrak, Rousseau and Barends, 2021)²⁸
or
"Pathways through organizational socialization" (Woodrow and Guest, 2020)³¹.

Using the key findings, reflect on how these could be implemented at a company you know, or at a suggested organisation.



¹⁶ www.edge.co.uk/documents/82/Edge__SSB-8_web-1c.pdf

¹⁷ graduatemarkettrends.cdn.prismic.io/graduatemarkettrends/f90f52ec-a7ed-45bc-a9b8-1873c0da2c41_skills-shortages-in-the-uk-201920.pdf

¹⁸ www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/08941920.2019.1610626

¹⁹ www.fdf.org.uk/globalassets/resources/publications/fdsc-workforce-skills-report.pdf

²⁰ socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/research/microsites/centreforruralpolicyresearch/pdfs/researchreports/Farm_labour_in_the_UK_Accessing_the_workforce_the_industry_needs_.pdf

²¹ ahdb.org.uk/pmids

²² projectblue.blob.core.windows.net/media/Default/What we do/Skills and training/Skills Strategy Full.pdf

Induction and workplace socialisation

- Allows staff to become functional in their role, and sustain the organisation (*Antonacopoulou and Güttel, 2010*)²⁶
- Should be designed to suit the individual and their experience, particularly for younger workers (*Johnson and Burden, 2003*)²⁷

Supervisory/management support

- Proven to enhance employee commitment (*Wietrak, Rousseau and Barends, 2021*)²⁸
- Can reduce workplace isolation (*Sahai, Ciby & Kahwaji, 2020*)²⁹
- Potentially improves employee wellbeing and performance (*Nielsen et al, 2017*)³⁰
- Helps employees navigate early difficulties in their role (*Woodrow and Guest, 2020*)³¹
- Supervisory support training can lead to demonstrable benefits in relation to occupational safety, health promotion and worker well-being (*Rohlman, TePoel and Campo, 2021*)³²

Peer support and workplace communication

- Supports integration and establishment for new workers (*Antonacopoulou and Güttel, 2010*)²⁶.
- Social support affects wellbeing and performance (*Nielsen et al, 2017*)³⁰
- Peer communication and support supports peer to peer workplace learning (*Crowley and Overton, 2021*)³³
- Workplace psychological safety supports employees' ability to accept and act on peer feedback (*Wietrak, Rousseau and Barends, 2021*)²⁸

Learning, development and training

- Line managers are vital in creating a culture which centres mutual support and learning (*Felstead and Unwin, 2016*)³⁴
- There is a risk in attempting to formalise and accredit informal learning, it has value in its own right (*Felstead and Unwin, 2016*)³⁴
- Non-pay rewards, such as training, have an impact on retention (*Rubenstein et al, 2017*)³⁵
- Improving employees' confidence in their skills can have a positive impact on engagement, and improve connection to farming values (*McDonald, 2017*)³⁶

Performance Management, Appraisals, Feedback and Goalsetting

- Goal setting must be adapted to the individual and their circumstances (*CIPD, 2016*)³⁷
- Separate administrative appraisal functions e.g. pay, from developmental elements (*CIPD, 2016*)³⁷
- Progress monitoring and feedback must be personalised (*Wietrak, Rousseau and Barends, 2021*)²⁸

Diversity and inclusion

- Diverse and inclusive workplaces bring multiple benefits, including enhancements to employee retention (*Food and Drink Federation, 2021*)³⁸
- Although inclusion is not effectively or consistently measured, there are signs that a lack of inclusion links to a reduction in employees' sense of safety at work, and their faith in management (*Whiting, 2021*)³⁹

Mentoring

- Mentoring leads to modest, positive measurable consequences for compensation, promotion and career satisfaction (*Allen et al, 2004*)⁴⁰
- For younger employees, having a mentor may support social and cultural workplace understanding (*Johnson and Burden, 2003*)⁴¹

Employee motivation

- Employees are intrinsically motivated by work that they perceive as meaningful (*Kolstrup, 2012; Wietrak, Rousseau & Barends, 2021*)^{42,28}
- Employees are motivated by the freedom to decide how to do their job (*Wietrak, Rousseau & Barends, 2021*)²⁸
- Psychological safety – The sense that it is safe to speak up, and that you will not be embarrassed, rejected or punished for doing so is crucial. It supports employee learning, communication and engagement, and benefits employee motivation (*Wietrak, Rousseau & Barends, 2021*)²⁸
- Employees desire fairness in their workplace, and this affects their motivation (*Wietrak, Rousseau & Barends, 2021*)²⁸

²³ foodresearch.org.uk/publications/review-of-labour-trends-uk-food-manufacturing/

²⁵ [projectblue.blob.core.windows.net/media/Default/AgriLeader/AHDB AgriLeader Bridging the Gap PDF Final 05.07.21.pdf](https://projectblue.blob.core.windows.net/media/Default/AgriLeader/AHDB%20AgriLeader%20Bridging%20the%20Gap%20Final%2005.07.21.pdf)

²⁹ iaeme.com/MasterAdmin/Journal_uploads/IJM/VOLUME_11_ISSUE_12/IJM_11_12_257.pdf

³⁶ [insidecotton.com/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1/4493/USQ1403 Final Report.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://insidecotton.com/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1/4493/USQ1403%20Final%20Report.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

³⁷ www.cipd.co.uk/Images/could-do-better_2016-assessing-what-works-in-performance-management_tcm18-16874.pdf

³⁸ www.fdf.org.uk/dfd/resources/publications/reports/food-and-drink-inclusion-and-diversity-report-2021/

³⁹ www.fca.org.uk/publication/research/review-research-literature-evidence-impact-diversity-inclusion-workplace.pdf

²⁴ www.managers.org.uk/-/media/Files/PDF/CMI-Management-Manifesto.pdf

²⁶ www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/17465681011017246/full/html

²⁷ www.jrf.org.uk/file/36863/download?token=SHRMf2sa&filetype=full-report

²⁸ www.cipd.co.uk/Images/work-motivation-scientific-summary_tcm18-89562.pdf

³⁰ tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02678373.2017.1304463

³¹ bpspsychub.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/joop.12285

³² www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8508500/

³³ www.cipd.co.uk/Images/learning-skills-work-report-2021-1_tcm18-95433.pdf

³⁴ dera.ioe.ac.uk/29185/

³⁵ tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/08941920.2019.1610626

⁴⁰ pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/14769125/

⁴¹ www.jrf.org.uk/file/36863/download?token=SHRMf2sa&filetype=full-report

⁴² pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/22317542/



SECTION 4

Overview of research project and key findings

Project outline

Research and data on the existing agricultural and agri-food workforce and best practice in leadership, management and employee development was reviewed as part of the project, and used to inform the research design.

A survey was then completed to collect data from 129 individuals from non-agricultural backgrounds, who either currently worked, have worked, or intended to work, in agriculture and agri-food. A series of ten detailed individual follow up interviews were completed to add depth and capture individual journeys and perspectives of new entrants from diverse non-agricultural backgrounds.

The complete project can be found at:

tfcct.co.uk/read-our-fcct-reports & harper.ac.uk/FCCTReport



Key findings

New entrants from non-agricultural backgrounds benefited from managers, mentors and colleagues who took an individual and personal approach to leading, managing and developing. Managers who did not align their approach to their employee's experience and readiness reduced employee perception of how positively their manager affected their performance in their job.

Safe and supportive workplace environments and relationships were crucial to the experience and engagement of new entrants from non-agricultural backgrounds. In order to support this group as effectively as possible, managers particularly needed to:

- Support informal communication - Informal communication was valued by new entrants from non-agricultural backgrounds, whether in team meetings and discussion, learning through 'osmosis' from the conversations of others, or when chatting with colleagues while completing daily tasks. It was also found that regular inclusion in team meetings and discussions created high value for professional development, and high impact on employee performance in role.
- Welcome questions - This research showed that when managers and supervisors recognised that those from non-agricultural backgrounds would need to ask questions, and welcomed them doing so, this was instrumental in helping new entrants to learn and establish themselves in a psychologically safe environment.
- Value and create opportunities for workplace learning, development and training – New entrants valued informal learning opportunities e.g. work demonstrations and shadowing, above formal learning processes e.g. induction and appraisal. However, formal processes were still perceived as being of medium or high value and impact by the majority of research participants. Where more formal processes did occur, content and timing was important. For example, where induction lasted for two or more days survey respondents were significantly more likely to report that this was of high value for their professional development and had a high impact on their performance in the role. There may also be a benefit in formal training or education leading to qualifications, sometimes as a way to 'prove' interest, commitment and aptitude for agriculture or agri-food. However, informal learning did not always need to be formalised to be of significant value to the new entrants.

- Provide mentoring - Mentors supported new entrants' wellbeing and inclusion, their development of role and sector understanding, and ultimately, job performance. This research found mentoring to be very individual, driven by the mentor and the mentee themselves, and the context of their relationship. It was highly valued by new entrants to agriculture and agri-food.

Managers in agriculture and agri-food would benefit from further development and training to effectively support new entrants. "Accidental managers" are common in both agriculture and agri-food (where an individual is promoted into a management position without training or guidance in this area). However, the experience of new entrants from non-agricultural backgrounds varied in accordance with the skillset of the manager they encountered. Therefore, management and leadership development in agriculture and agri-food organisation would be a wise investment, despite the potential costs and time required.

Throughout agriculture and agri-food there is a continued need



to dispel myths, remove barriers, and build diversity and inclusion. Gatekeeping exists around who is, or is not, agricultural, which can create a sense of alienation. This research captured personal experiences of feeling excluded in agricultural and agri-food settings, sometimes due to non-agricultural backgrounds, but also in relation to being part of other underrepresented groups. However, those who participated in this research recognised the positive challenge and change that diversity can bring. Misconceptions and myths also exist in relation to the nature of agricultural and agri-food work, and whether the sector is open to new entrants. The factors and influences that successfully brought new entrants from this project into agriculture and agri-food varied, but included family and friends, event attendance and farm visits, time in rural settings, and conservation and environmental factors. Building on these contact points and working to remove misunderstanding between non-agricultural and agricultural groups is vital; the stories told in the case studies and through this research are intended to support this, by starting discussion and raise awareness.

Suggested activities

- 1 Design a training and development strategy for a food manufacturer with 200 employees, that prioritises the creation of safe and supportive workplace environments and relationships. How would you ensure that it delivers the following key components?
 - Supports informal communication
 - Welcomes employee questions
 - Values and creates varied opportunities for workplace learning, development and training
 - Provides opportunities for mentoring
- 2 What is your own experience of myths and barriers in agriculture and agri-food? How have these myths and barriers affected you?



SECTION 5

Case studies



CASE STUDY

The self-employed small flock manager

Background

Stormur is not from a farming family, although on exploring his family tree he discovered there were agricultural workers in his family, generations ago. Stormur wasn't particularly focused at school and college, where he studied logistics. He knew he didn't really want a career working with people, but wasn't sure what he did want to do. He worked in a range of sectors and careers, before finding his way into agriculture.

Route into farming/agriculture/agri-food

After a serious accident, Stormur had post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and multiple serious injuries. While recuperating, he attended the Cheshire Show, and spoke to his local Young Farmers Club (YFC). Through YFC he had a chance encounter with a farmer who invited Stormur to his organic farm, which produced potatoes and eggs; Stormur's agricultural career started there. However, in that role, he suffered a further injury, tearing all the tendons in his hand. Stormur was subsequently diagnosed with Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, a condition that can cause joint hypermobility, pain and dislocations, as well as fatigue, and other difficulties with day to day activities. Once Stormur was able to work again, he gained experience with sheep via the National Sheep Association (NSA), and was about to establish his own flock. However, he was then set back by a further road accident with recovery taking a year. Stormur was finally able to establish his own flock in 2021. He uses holistic management and regenerative agriculture principles to raise 100% pasture-fed lamb, hogget, mutton and wool products, whilst also improving the grazed land.

First job in agriculture

As described above, Stormur's first experience in agriculture came about by chance, when he began to explore farming independently, by attending agricultural shows and YFC. He didn't have any formal interviews or induction. However, Stormur felt his

first manager used a good approach to support someone new to agriculture. He would show Stormur how one job was done on the farm, for example, using the potato harvester, and let Stormur get to grips with it, before moving on to teach the next task. This approach helped Stormur to build his skills and experience. The business also had a farm shop, and the shop manager (who was the farmer's wife) also supported Stormur in developing gradually, to build confidence. The other team member who worked there was also happy to teach and train Stormur. The management and support in this setting was informal, but well suited to Stormur and his level of knowledge and development at the time.

Other influential experiences

To get started, Stormur attended a lambing course by offered by Kate and Jim Bevan (who featured on Lambing Live), which he found useful. However, when building up his experience with sheep, Stormur had more mixed experiences. For example, Stormur worked for one sheep farmer who left him to do solo night checks, even though he knew Stormur had very limited experience with sheep. The farmer had forbidden Stormur to touch the sheep at night, so when Stormur spotted a ewe that was in trouble, he immediately woke the farmer to help. Despite Stormur acting promptly and appropriately, the farmer delayed taking any action and then blamed Stormur when the lambs did not survive. Stormur said "That was the first time it was like, oh, I don't really feel like I'm welcome".

Stormur's first proper lambing contract was a much better experience, where the head shepherd was happy for him to be properly involved and helped Stormur to learn on the job, allowing him to build his skills and knowledge. An opportunity to travel to Iceland then arose. Stormur found the approach in Iceland was "Ask, answer, observe", and that for him, it was the best place and learning experience, commenting "I probably learnt more in Iceland than I learnt anywhere else".

“Definitely do it. You will find your own little niche in what you want to do, but it might take a while to find it.”

Networks and connections

Coming from a non-agricultural background, Stormur had to build up his own network of farming connections. He did this by getting to know his neighbours, who have helped him to fill in gaps in his knowledge e.g. hay making. Stormur also attends events, like the flock health days offered by his local veterinary practice, and his local agricultural discussion group.

Stormur has also made really good use of online networks, like the NSA website, Twitter and Facebook groups, to ask questions and learn from more experienced farmers. He has benefitted from the AgrAbility network (based in the USA) who helped him to get in touch with an occupational therapist to support Stormur to find ways of doing things that work for his body. Stormur has also accessed free training as a disabled new entrant, via Holistic Management International, which has “probably been [the] biggest support in terms of learning and planning things like grazing, finances and cropping”. However, there is no UK equivalent, and Stormur has found that while there is rightly a focus on mental health in the agricultural sector, there is very limited support for anyone in the sector affected by physical health issues



Stormur's advice for managers

"I'd say be prepared for a lot of questions. Get used to new entrants asking things a couple of times, because they're taking so much in."

"I found it good to shadow someone for a day or two."

"Let them know when they're doing something wrong, especially if it's unsafe."

Other resources

- Stormur's own website where you can read more about this journey so far www.vikinggrazers.uk
- Stormur was inspired by the book *Dirt to Soil*, by Gabe Brown, which he found "spoke to me about certain things in conventional modern farming that I felt 'weren't quite right' but I didn't know the correct words to use, such as monocropping, mass use of fertilisers, herbicides and pesticides etc. There were certain things I'd experienced first-hand that didn't make much sense to me, but because I was new to the Industry, [I thought] it must make good sense for the farmer or he wouldn't be doing it".
- AgrAbility is a US based organisation which aims to enhance quality of life for farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural workers with disabilities. They have an excellent range of resources freely available on their website www.agrability.org
- Acas offer a range of resources and information regarding UK employment law, and best practice in relation to disability, on their website www.acas.org.uk/disability-at-work



Suggested activities

- 1 Stormur advised managers to "Let [new entrants] know when they're doing something wrong, especially if it's unsafe". Imagine you are a manager who has noticed an inexperienced employee doing something that puts either people or livestock, at risk.
 - What immediate action would you take?
 - What follow up actions would you consider?
- 2 Stormur mentioned the approach of "Ask, answer, observe" in Iceland. When managers encourage questions, this helps new entrants establish themselves in a psychologically safe environment, supporting their learning and development. Identify three ways for an employer to create a work environment which encourages questions.
- 3 Learn about the rights of disabled workers in the UK.
 - What is the key piece of legislation that protects the rights of disabled workers in the UK, and how does this legislation define disability?
 - What is a "reasonable adjustment"?
 - Identify three reasonable adjustments that might support Stormur in his day to day work.

Acknowledgements

Case Author: Claire Toogood Design: James Armstrong

Case Subject and Photography: Stormur Normannsson

Research supported by The Farmers Club Charitable Trust Agricultural Educator Award 2021

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.





CASE STUDY

From teaching to teaching farming to managing food sustainability

Background

Ben didn't grow up on a farm. He also didn't take any qualifications or gain significant work experience in agriculture until he already had a role connected to farming. Originally, Ben "didn't have a very good relationship with formal education" and he didn't enjoy school.

Route into food and farming

In Year 10, Ben had to do two weeks of work experience. His school's lab technician invited him to work for one of those weeks on their farm, and Ben "...loved it. It was the best week I've ever had. It was fantastic." and "that one week, it stuck with me". However, he didn't pursue it any further at that point, deciding to study marine biology, to pursue a career linked to the sea.

After graduating Ben struggled to find a suitable job, but was keen to travel. He therefore took a teaching qualification, as the qualification was funded, and he had friends who had qualified as teachers who were working abroad. Ben's second teaching placement was at a pupil referral unit, working with children who hadn't engaged well with formal education. This chimed with his own experience, and as a result Ben's first teaching job was with a vocational group who spent three days a week at school, one day at college, and one in work: "They learnt a trade and they got their core qualifications. It was bespoke education for kids that needed it."

When the government changed the curriculum and required all pupils to complete double science, Ben knew this wouldn't work for his group of pupils, "...so, I went to the headteacher and said we can't do this. We're a rural school in a rural setting, we'd be better off teaching agriculture.". The headteacher was supportive, as long as Ben could raise funds and support for the scheme. Ben looked into City and Guilds qualifications and visited a school that was already running agricultural education. He realised that his school needed funding and links with local agricultural employers to be successful, so he created a budget, approached four large local agricultural businesses for funding and support, and identified suitable land on the school site. As a

result, Ben ended up running an agricultural education unit, but with no agricultural background himself. He started doing work at local farm businesses at weekends to learn basic skills to pass on to the students. After that experience, he later moved to a role running an established farm unit at a different school. Ben was tasked with turning that unit from running at a loss to being financially viable. He described that role as "my real baptism in agriculture", where he learned a much wider range of agricultural skills, including butchery. Ben also built contacts in catering and restaurants, including Michelin starred chefs, developing his understanding of the food sector.

Management and development in first agricultural role

In the self-created farm unit, Ben was still being managed by the headteacher of the school. Ben found "the education system would grind me down routinely. What [the head] let me do was rewrite elements of the system and I think that that sort of kept me happy.". He also received recognition for his work "If I did something well I might get a letter just popped in my pigeonhole saying I noticed this the other day and thank you very much. Or, there'd be a bottle of wine.". He said he always knew where he stood, "...and where there were problems, he was honest. And that honesty more than anything actually kept me going."

The local employers that he worked with also offered development and experience in a range of agricultural skills. For example, shortly after he'd passed his driving test, one local dealership trusted Ben to drive large, valuable agricultural vehicles, out to customers.

Advocacy and networks

Later in his career, when working with restauranteurs and chefs, Ben found that people taking the time to advocate for what he was doing made a huge difference, as "it's very hard launching a product where it's very niche and you don't have that network of supporters when you're going in cold into an industry that's not yours.". Ben said that they recognised and supported his work by

Ben's advice

for new entrants to agriculture and agri-food

“The biggest advice I can give, and it's a Lean principle, is something called gemba. Go and physically see it.”

“Ask what might be perceived as a stupid question. But, don't be afraid to, you know, nobody knows all of the answers. And even if somebody laughs, they'll still give you a straight answer afterwards.”

“If you go and say, 'I'm not ashamed to admit I don't know all of the answers, but I would like your help so I can help you better'. That will break down barriers and actually people will respect you.”

putting his name on the menu and talking about his produce. As a result, “...people would turn up at our little farm shop because they'd eaten the products.”.

Ben also found people being unsupportive also motivated him to succeed “It's not been the positive influences that necessarily have driven me on always, it has been that need to overcome barriers.”. Ben has met pig farmers who on hearing about the scale what he has done have openly laughed and said “Well, that's not real farming”. Ben feels “...they're right to a certain degree. It's not real on a commercial scale, but it's still farming and actually, we've gone and proven them wrong.”.

Management processes

In Ben's experience, targets and monitoring work well, if targets are relevant and valuable to the business and individual, and there is appropriate support and development in place. Ben found that the headteacher in the first school made good use of performance management, and would take action when targets weren't met. However, dismissal was a last resort, “...before then, there was coaching, there was mentoring, and it came in all sorts of diverse forms.”. The headteacher was also “quick to admit when the measure was wrong”, and to only measure what really added value.

In relation to coaching and mentoring, Ben explains coaching as when someone has “a development need, and [...] somebody else supports you in developing or acquiring that skill.”. He describes it as “here's the steps, here's the stages, off you go”. Mentoring may include coaching, but it's also “being an advocate”, taking the time to link them with others, supporting them in seeking out opportunities, and “taking an active role in their development”. He feels businesses in agriculture and agri-food need to be open to taking keen candidates who don't have the perfect CV or background, and then “actively plan ahead for coaching and development to fill that gap”.

Ben also feels that “onboarding and skills mapping are really, really important as well” to allow “recognition of prior learning and experience”. As a career changer it has made a big difference to Ben when employers have taken the time to have “enlightened” conversations about which training and development is genuinely needed for learning, and how training activities might also be valuable in other ways, for example, to allow the building of networks and contacts.

Ben's advice for managers

Be “...open to the value of diversity. Diversity is important because it enables change. If the job never changes I don't know if I'm going to stay. So, embrace change. Continuous improvement is continuous change.”

Other resources

- Ben feels Chris Argyris' work on single and double loop learning has had a massive influence on his own career and the culture he aspires to create which is that “We don't hide problems, we fix problems. We'll fix it and next time we'll learn that that's the way we do it.”. You can read more about Argyris and his work here harper.ac.uk/infed-org
- Later in Ben's career he took a course in lean management in dairy operations. Ben describes this as “game changing for me”, as it is “applicable across almost everything that we do”. You can read more about lean management here harper.ac.uk/ahdb-org



Suggested activities

- 1 Research on goalsetting and performance appraisal shows that goal setting must be adapted to the individual and their circumstances. Specific and challenging goals can be strong motivators, but, when an individual is learning new skills it is more effective to set goals that focus on learning and behaviour. Progress monitoring and feedback is also crucial.

harper.ac.uk/cipd-pdf

In this case study:

- What is said about goal setting and monitoring?
 - What does Ben say about treating career changers and/or new entrants as individuals?
 - How would you manage goal setting, progress monitoring and review, and feedback for the following staff:
 - A new entrant in their first role in agri-food or agriculture.
 - A seasonal worker who comes back to your organisation each summer.
 - An established worker near to retirement.
 - A newly promoted manager in your organisation.
- 2 As a manager himself, Ben uses principles of lean management. In the case study Ben mentions “gemba”. Research what gemba means, and suggest five ways that the principles of gemba could lead to more effective people management in an organisation.



Acknowledgements

Case Author: Claire Toogood Design: James Armstrong

Case Subject and Photography: Ben Williams

Research supported by The Farmers Club Charitable Trust Agricultural Educator Award 2021

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.





CASE STUDY

A life changing placement

Background

Jodie didn't have "...any links to agriculture" before coming into the sector. Whilst at Cardiff University studying Biology, Jodie opted to do a placement year, and started to look for opportunities.

Jodie attended a talk from a student who had previously completed their placement at Eurofins Scientific. Jodie thought the idea of agricultural field trials sounded interesting, and as the placement was one of few paid opportunities, the chance to earn a good salary was also very appealing.

Jodie found she really enjoyed her placement year describing it as "a revelation – you can actually do science, outside!". She stayed on over the summer, after the official placement had ended, and therefore spent a total of 15 months at Eurofins, at that time. They also asked her to interview for their graduate scheme, with potential sponsorship towards her final year. Jodie did this, and was successful, securing funding for her final year and a graduate job offer, before returning to complete her degree.

Management and development in first agricultural role

Eurofins took on multiple placement students, and with a well-established placement programme, Jodie found the experience was well-structured and organised. Jodie felt "I was quite lucky in that the people managing me recognised that I was quite ambitious and driven and they gave me quite a lot of responsibility, which I really enjoyed."

Initially, there was an induction process, taking a over a week, so that placement students could familiarise themselves with the company, the ethos and ethics behind trials, data collection, and product registration. Jodie was provided with a booklet with targets and a training and development pathway to show how the year would progress, and what she could expect during that time. Placement students were allocated into different teams, and then rotated around the business to get wider experience.

Regular Monday morning meetings were held to discuss the week ahead, the work that was coming up, and related strategies, decisions and issues. Eurofins also held a company-

wide meeting annually to "update on new training, with various colleagues across the business [giving] presentations on their areas of expertise". Jodie described that as being "really useful because you get to touch base with colleagues from around the business you don't necessarily see all the time."

Placement students were also mentored by more experienced members of the team. This included visiting trials, and assisting other staff to create opportunities for "teaching and showing us things as we're going along". There were also opportunities to "touch base with how we were feeling about our progress and just to get a bit of direction ourselves, if there are things that we wanted to get more involved with.". Looking back, Jodie also noted that the managers were "allocating us around with different people to make sure we [saw] different crops, different trials, just to broaden our understanding and knowledge.". Jodie describes herself as "quite a structured person" so she really appreciated having an outline of what was expected of her. As the year progressed it also gave her "a way of benchmarking as well - to see, this is where I started, and this is how far I've come."

Eurofins offered opportunities for formal training, with Jodie taking courses and qualifications on handling and applying pesticides, during her placement. Jodie found further opportunities for growth through her work, where "they got me involved with data analysis and collection, and ultimately started giving me a lot of responsibility and trials of my own."

Jodie feels the support and trust placed in her gave her confidence in her own ability to do the job. This was particularly important as Jodie had no background in this area, describing herself as "not even knowing the difference between wheat and barley"; she had to learn everything from scratch. Eurofins supported her in "building up that foundational knowledge" through practices like regular, small identification tests. Jodie was driven to succeed, and felt "like I had quite a lot to prove".

Jodie's advice for new entrants to agriculture

“Try to get as much broad experience as possible. Don't put all your eggs in one basket, because there's so many different careers in agriculture.

Try things out and speak to lots of different people as well. There's such a wealth of knowledge and experience in the industry. So just talk to people and find out about their careers, how they got to where they are.”

Building a network

Jodie has found “...it's quite a small industry, relative to a lot of other industries. You know, once you're in it, you get to know people very, very quickly.” She feels it is a real community “So we're always talking about the weather, how the season's gone, how farmers are feeling, what the yields are like, and there's a lot of like emotional investment in the outcomes of the work that we're doing. So, I think you tend to form quite strong relationships with people because you're all working towards similar collective goals.”

As well as formal mentoring at Eurofins, Jodie has built up relationships with other people who she sees as mentors. For her, they are “someone I speak to as a bit of a sounding board about what I'm thinking or considering, [learning from] their experience and the time that they had in the industry. Because they will see things that I don't necessarily see.” Jodie feels the industry really relies on these personal connections, and that it is really important to build up your own network and relationships, to support your own career, and the careers of others.

However, Jodie has sometimes found that being openly gay within the agricultural industry can be tricky. She feels that this has improved during her career, but there is still a long way to go to reach genuine inclusivity in agriculture. She doesn't always find it comfortable to correct assumptions, or challenge certain jokes and behaviours, which can feel like she is “holding myself back a little bit”.

Jodie's advice

for managers

“Break things down and don't assume that they know anything. Just be honest, and talk to them and ask them how much they do know.”

“Try to establish the starting point so you can move forward and also, keep checking in with them. Because there is a hell of a lot to learn, you know, in agriculture. It's amazing how complicated it is [...]. People that just go about their lives, they buy their food in the supermarket. They don't understand how much work goes into getting that food there and how many processes are involved.”

“[People will] build up their knowledge to move on to the next thing. I think it's about recognising and supporting people to achieve what they want within their roles, but also allowing them to branch out ready to go and do something else.”

Other resources

- Lantra Scotland have produced an “Employer's Toolkit” which can be viewed online:
www.scotland.lantra.co.uk/employers-toolkit
The guide talks about mentoring on pages 13-15.
- Agrespect is an online resource to support diversity in the countryside and encourage inclusiveness:
agrespect.com
- Jodie is a keen podcast listener, as she spends a lot of time on the road, for her work. She recommends:
 - A Tramlines: www.agrii.co.uk/tramlines-podcast
 - B The Modern Acre: themodernacre.com
 - C Farmerarma: farmerama.co
 - D Crop It Like It's Hot:
www.fginsight.com/crop-it-like-its-hot



A



B



C



D



Suggested activities

- 1 In this case study, Jodie mentions personal connections.
 - How did Eurofins create informal and formal opportunities for placement students to build personal connections?
 - Why does Jodie feel that people in the agricultural sector form really strong connections and working relationships?
- 2 Mentoring has been shown to produce positive outcomes in relation to career satisfaction, promotion and reward.
 - In the case study, why does Jodie value her mentors?
 - What benefits can mentoring create for the people being mentored (sometimes called mentees), their mentors, and the organisation?
 - Is there anyone that you would consider to be a mentor? If so, how has this helped you?

Acknowledgements

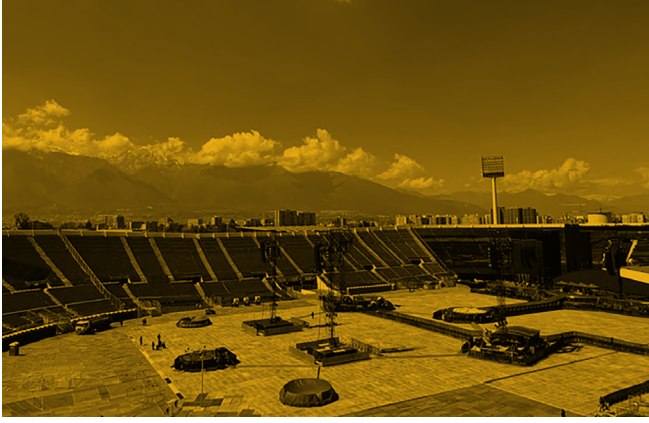
Case Author: Claire Toogood Design: James Armstrong

Case Subject and Photography: Jodie Littleford

Research supported by The Farmers Club Charitable Trust Agricultural Educator Award 2021

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.





CASE STUDY

Two careers, one dream

Background

Matt wasn't born into a family with any land, although he did grow up in a rural area, and that gave him the opportunity to try working on local farms. Matt found he loved the work "from day one, something clicks". As a teenager, Matt started out helping out friends on local farms, and later took on paid part time and seasonal agricultural work, to build his experience. Matt then studied mechanical engineering at college, before going straight to work at the beef and sheep farm described below. Matt returned to education in his mid-twenties, studying agriculture at Myerscough College. He did this to "open up pathways within agriculture [...] by doing a degree, I open myself up to higher level management, if I want to go down that route".

Management and development in first agricultural role

Matt's first proper agricultural job was on a beef and sheep farm, where he worked as a Stockman. He knew the family who owned the farm, and heard about the opportunity through word of mouth. As with many family farms, there was no formal management structure, and Matt learned by shadowing an older farmhand, as well as using the experience and knowledge he had gained as a teenager on other local farms, which gave him "a feel for what need to happen, in what order, on a typical day".

Strategic career choices

However, Matt realised that working on farm, even with a degree, was not going to allow him to buy his own land. "I discovered after putting pen to paper and doing the maths - if I want to do this on my own and set up by myself, this pay just doesn't scale to the right sort of level to allow you to save, invest and live."

Matt's hobby was sound engineering, so he took a course in that, which led to an additional job working for a company that provides audio systems for high profile musicians and acts. This work paid significantly more than farming, and Matt decided to "keep the two [jobs] running in parallel, I can keep my foot in the farming because that's what I love. That's my passion. And I can earn money doing something that I actually quite like doing."

Matt finds touring takes him away from the farm, but in the longer term this is worth it, as he can save for equipment and a tenancy, and be taken seriously. Matt describes it as "doing what I need to do to get to my dream", and feels that after five years he is now in a realistic and reasonable financial position to make serious tenancy applications.

Developing understanding

Matt describes his non-agricultural background as a "massive advantage" because he "can observe multiple different farms without really judging. I've got nobody on my shoulder or in my ear, telling me 'this, that, the other', 'because we always have' or 'because your granddad or your dad did it'. None of that.". Matt found doing his degrees and approaching agriculture as a science helped him to evaluate the industry and consider how to use "science as a tool to grow and to be profitable and to be efficient".

Matt hopes to secure a tenancy in the future and has considered how he would lead and manage on his own farm. He thinks it's really important to get visitors onto the farm, children, students, people changing careers, people who have been in the forces etc. When they visit to learn about farming, they also need to see the people behind the farm, so they see the people that run it, their skills and their challenges. Matt wants "to invest in people, and I would look beyond the farming community for [...] new ideas."

Matt has been influenced by seeing people "doing what I envisage doing". He has found role models and mentors in the agricultural sector, through attending events and making contacts, and from his education at Myerscough College.

Matt's advice for new entrants to agriculture

“See if it really is for you. Throw yourself in the deep end and do the hours and try. You’ll know if it clicks with you. Straight away you’ll know. Work experience – just literally get out, knock on some doors, pester!”

Matt's advice for managers

In relation to new entrants: “If someone wants to be on a farm, they want to be there. Because ordinarily, you’d look at that and you’d run a mile if you didn’t want to be there or involved. Usually the smells sort the wheat from the chaff!”

“You never know, that new person might have seen something somewhere else that can go into the pot.”

“Not to say we’re doing it this way because we always have. That doesn’t work, and I think that hinders a business in trying to grow. You’re not utilising something new or fresh. So, be open minded.”

Other resources

Matt recommended two books that have influenced his thinking about agriculture, animals and food:

- Sacred Cow: The Case for (Better) Meat: Why Well-Raised Meat Is Good for You and Good for the Planet by Diana Rodgers and Robb Wolf; and
- Grass-Fed Nation: Getting Back the Food We Deserve by Graham Harvey.



Suggested activities

- 1 In the case study, Matt discusses employing staff from a range of backgrounds, who may not be from farming families. What benefits does Matt think this can bring to a farm?
- 2 Supporting people to change careers may be one of the solutions to the skills shortages in agriculture and agri-food. Look at an organisation working to support this, for example, Ruralink (ruralink.org.uk) or MDS (www.mds-ltd.co.uk/careers/).
 - How does the organisation you are looking at support individuals to consider careers in agriculture and agri-food?
 - What skills that are relevant to agriculture and agri-food could be developed in other careers, workplaces or experiences?
 - How can leaders and managers in any organisation make sure their approach to recruitment supports career changers?



Acknowledgements

Case Author: Claire Toogood Design: James Armstrong

Case Subject and Photography: Matt Latham

Research supported by The Farmers Club Charitable Trust Agricultural Educator Award 2021

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.





CASE STUDY

Discovering agriculture in Australia

Background

Maisie didn't grow up on a farm or working on farms. Although she lived in a rural area she had never considered agriculture as a potential career path. She initially intended to study sports science or physiotherapy, until a trip to Australia changed her career path.

Route into farming/agriculture/agri-food

Maisie "fell into agriculture by chance" when she went to Australia and started working in a pub. The pub owner also owned a station [farm], and asked Maisie if she'd be interested in helping out there as well. Maisie found that she loved the farming community and the work, and started to look for more agricultural opportunities on her travels. The experience on the station led to Maisie's first full time role in agriculture, tractor driving for a cotton-picking contracting company. She asked around for agricultural opportunities, and found out about the vacancy for a tractor driver. Maisie had never driven a tractor before, but decided to go for it, telling them she could "probably learn", and they agreed to take a chance on her.

Management and development in first agricultural role

Maisie described her manager in that job as "very relaxed, very nice, and easy to get along with". Her tractor driving training was informal, she was put on a tractor with one of the other drivers to learn how to drive, and what she needed to do. Maisie was happy with this, and felt confident after that day of training. Working in Australia, Maisie could be up to 60km away from her manager. However, if she needed anything she could message or call her manager, or one of the other workers for support. Maisie said that as well as helping her with any issues, radio communication between staff also helped her to understand the bigger picture as "it was really helpful to hear what people were talking about all

the time, just to have awareness of what was going on". Other staff, such as the cook who took food out to the workers also provided an opportunity for Maisie to informally check anything she was unsure of. At the end of each day, staff cleaned the pickers and returned to a shared house. Maisie found she learned a lot by "having a chat, while you're scraping out the inside of the machines".

Maisie felt that being new to agriculture was actually an asset in the longer term. "I suppose at first it was a negative thing. Because I didn't have the basic understanding of how a plant grows, or know a lot about cows. It took me a long time to pick it all up because it's terminology that I'm not used to and a way of working I'm not used to. I'd worked in pubs but I'd never worked 18-hour stints. But, if you don't have the experience, you haven't learned anything wrong. I think workers often pick up things from working at home that maybe aren't used in other farms or aren't the right way of going about things. I could be taught exactly how they wanted me to drive tractors and manage the machinery".

Developing understanding

After returning from Australia, Maisie added to her understanding and knowledge with further work in the dairy industry. During this time, she tried to pick up the Farmers Weekly every week, but found it hard to fully understand, because she didn't know all the words and terms. Despite this, she decided to do a degree in agriculture, where she developed an interest in machinery. Maisie was later invited to write an article for the Farmers Weekly. She took this opportunity because "it wasn't obvious you could come from a non-agricultural background into farming" and if she had seen an article like that earlier in her career she would have found it encouraging and inclusive.

Maisie's advice for new entrants to agriculture

“I feel like my journey changed my life, definitely for the better. So, I'd say jump at every opportunity, and also take anything that you can get from any options that you're given. I've always taken on any training that anyone's offered me. I try to tick all the boxes. I think because I'm from a non-agricultural background I feel like I just have to check everything off to make sure that everyone can see that I'm qualified.”

Maisie's advice for managers

"I think just treat new entrants the same, but with a bit more leniency. And I think that questions should be encouraged - I've always appreciated managers taking the time to explain something to me. Patience is important, and not laughing at questions."

"Put them with a mentor, that one person to ask everything to, or go to for advice. A nice person to be used as kind of a point of contact. You don't always want to ask your manager questions where the answer might be quite obvious."



Acknowledgements

Case Author: Claire Toogood Design: James Armstrong

Case Subject and Photography: Maisie Wildgoose

Research supported by The Farmers Club Charitable Trust Agricultural Educator Award 2021

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.



Other resources

- Maisie recommends "Rebel Ideas" by Matthew Syed, which she says "offers a great perspective on the importance of cognitive diversity in teams." Cognitive diversity can include diversity of background, and is a highly relevant concept when thinking about new entrants in agriculture.
- You can read Maisie's Farmers Weekly interview: www.fwi.co.uk/farm-life/young-farmers/placement-year-student-follows-her-ag-dream



Suggested activities

- 1 During Maisie's time working in Australia, informal communication helped her to understand more about agriculture.
 - Identify three types of informal communication mentioned in the case study.
 - Identify three potential barriers to communication mentioned in the case study.
 - How can managers create opportunities for informal communication to benefit employees?
 - Are there any drawbacks to learning from informal communication?

- 2 Maisie recommended reading "Rebel Ideas" by Matthew Syed. You can view a brief clip about the book and the principles of cognitive diversity on YouTube: youtu.be/V1rpuN_nZJE



How can agricultural workplaces benefit from diverse teams? In your group, discuss what a manager could do to maximise the benefits of having a diverse team in one of the following situations.

- A dairy farm with has bought a new milk recording software package - all staff need to become competent in using it, but there is a reluctance to engage with it.
- A farm manager is thinking of diversifying into glamping, but needs to weigh up the pros and cons for the business, and the next steps they would need to take.



CASE STUDY

The “Grower to Grocer” trainee

Background

Shan Li grew up in Malaysia and moved to the UK to study for her A-levels. She didn't study a subject related to agriculture for her undergraduate degree, and didn't grow up on a farm. She had no farming experience when she started her postgraduate degree at the Royal Agricultural University (RAU).

Route into food and farming

After her undergraduate degree, Shan Li worked in tax consultancy, but wanted a career change. She was really interested in food, but knew that hospitality work wasn't right for her. During the early Covid-19 lockdown Shan Li took a number of online courses, including one on sustainable agriculture and food security, which caught her interest. She was also influenced by Dan Cox who runs Crocadon Farm in Cornwall, and is a regenerative farmer and chef. Shan Li started looking at courses related to sustainable agriculture, and in 2021-22 studied MSc Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security at RAU. As part of her course, she researched Community-Supported Agriculture and how CSA organisations can improve food accessibility. Part way through studying for her Masters degree, Shan Li successfully applied for a traineeship at OrganicLea, which is a community food project in north-east London. She is on their “Grower to Grocer” programme, which she found appealing as it allowed her to learn about food production, but also how produce is marketed and sold, particularly in relation to OrganicLea's fruit and veg box scheme.

Management and development in first agricultural role

During her traineeship, Shan Li has found that the programme and role is “very structured”, with set days and activities. She has an allocated mentor who she meets monthly, and her objectives and progress are monitored via a skills and learning outcomes

tracking grid. Shan Li joined a volunteer induction when she first started to learn about OrganicLea and their site. As it is a worker's co-operative she does not have a set manager, but Shan Li is comfortable to ask anyone questions, when needed, and also feels she learns a lot through chatting to other workers while harvesting or doing other shared jobs. Shan Li can also access careers advice during the traineeship, with discussion and support to help her consider her future options for progression.

Developing understanding

Shan Li has found the support from her mentor really helpful. They advised her to “make sure your voice is heard”, and to push for the opportunities that will help her to develop. In Shan Li's case this included finding out more about what happened “behind the scenes, like sitting in on meetings about ordering” so she could develop her understanding of how the organisation worked. Her mentor therefore also acted as an advocate, helping Shan Li to access the opportunities that were right for her.

Shan Li's advice for managers

“The scary bit about looking at all of these job specs is everything says you need to have experience in what you're applying for. It would be helpful to recognise that I have other skills that are really relevant.”

“It would be useful to have extra support, as I haven't come from an agricultural background. Sometimes I feel like I've asked way too many questions.”



Shan Li's advice

for new entrants to agriculture and agri-food

“In London, there’s so many community gardens that you can volunteer at on the weekends. I think doing that and speaking to people about what you’re interested in, is a good option, which doesn’t require too much commitment to start.”

“Find the things that you feel really passionate about.”

“Doing a post-grad signalled my interest in the sector, but that might not be accessible to everyone.”

More information about OrganicLea, their traineeships, and their vision

Quotes and information in this section from OrganicLea team leader, and organisational website.

Based in the Lea Valley in north-east London, OrganicLea operates as a workers’ co-operative that produces and distributes food and plants locally. A workers’ co-operative is an organisation where the activities are managed by the workers directly; the organisation is owned and run by the workers, without the need for separate managers or owners. OrganicLea is also a not-for-profit enterprise. Their website explains that “if there is any surplus it is reinvested within OrganicLea”.

OrganicLea offer a range of voluntary and traineeship opportunities, to allow individuals to get involved in their work and mission, whether that is for a few hours a month, or a more regular weekly commitment. Their traineeship opportunities are structured and varied, from the “Grower to Grocer” programme that Shan Li is completing, through to traineeships focusing solely on production, bees and pollinators, infrastructure, fruit and vine, and community learning, to name but a few.

OrganicLea recognises that “every trainee is different, they have different backgrounds and they have come with different skill sets and interests as well.”. They create a bespoke development plan for each trainee, with a monthly review that allows the trainee and their mentor to consider “where are the gaps, what’s relevant, what’s not, and is there anything we should add”. This process helps to “make that space for the trainees to develop their own interests and [be supported to] create their own opportunities.”. This approach has allowed previous trainees to move on and establish their own small businesses, or begin working in other community gardens, farms and projects. Many former trainees have also retained close links with OrganicLea and continue to work with them in a variety of ways.

As well as offering a box scheme and plant sales to the local community, OrganicLea also works to offer educational opportunities. They provide Level 1 and Level 2 City and Guilds horticulture courses, as well as offering outreach activities and gardening programmes for local schools. They recognise that there is a challenge to attract and retain people to the sector, and to raise awareness of opportunities, and encourage more diverse entrants. Their work is underpinned by their vision to “bring people together to take action towards a more just and sustainable society”.

Other resources

- Shan Li was inspired by Dan Cox’s journey from food into agriculture. You can read more about this here: www.bighospitality.co.uk/Article/2020/11/06/Chef-grower-Dan-Cox-Melilot-farm-Cornwall-restaurant
- Shan Li was also inspired by the “Kiss the Ground” documentary that can be viewed on Netflix.
- You can read about OrganicLea here: www.organiclea.org.uk/about/



Suggested activities

- 1 Using Shan Li’s case study and the OrganicLea website, consider how OrganicLea’s vision and values affects their organisational structure, their activities and their approach to management.
- 2 Shan Li participated in a traineeship, which is a longer-term learning and development programme. As a new entrant to agri-food, this allowed her to build practical skills and wider knowledge. Use the case study to review what Shan Li found valuable about her traineeship.
- 3 Design a six-month traineeship for a role in agriculture or agri-food, for a new entrant. Consider:
 - What skills and knowledge would the trainee need, in order to become effective?
 - What learning and development activities could be included in the traineeship to support the trainee to develop the relevant skills and knowledge?
 - How can managers and colleagues support the trainee?
 - What is the timeframe for each part of the traineeship?
 - How will the trainee’s learning and development be assessed?
 - Are there any other factors you need to consider?

Acknowledgements

Case Author: Claire Toogood **Design:** James Armstrong
Case Subject and Photography: Shan Li Ng (with additional information provided by OrganicLea)
Research supported by The Farmers Club Charitable Trust Agricultural Educator Award 2021

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.



