

Preparing for a career in agricultural management

Ahead of his time, a Hampshire farmer knew that agriculture had to develop a new generation of leaders by equipping them with the right skills early on in their careers. Nearly 40 years on, **Ian Ashbridge** sees how that legacy has helped almost 250 people

THE JOHN EDGAR TRUST MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT AWARD

Are you ready for your first management position? To take the lead and direct others in an agricultural business? The first management role can be a daunting – and lonely – experience. But there are ways you can get prepared.

The John Edgar Trust was estab-

lished shortly after John Edgar's death in the early 1970s to remember his vision and belief that to secure its profitable future, British agriculture had to nurture and develop its young leadership talent.

The first trustees designed the course with the remit that it should "enhance leadership and management skills within agriculture and the land-based industries". Reflecting John Edgar's influence in Hampshire, it was aimed pri-

marily at young farming people from within the county, but now considers applications from suitable individuals from southern England to Suffolk and the midlands.

Typically, the trustees receive about 50 applications, from which they will select a group of 12 scholars to take part in the course. Selection is competitive, so it is important to make a good case.

One unique feature of the JET scheme is that it is free to those that are selected; three weeks of lectures, group activity, farm walks and visits and accommodation and meals.

outside the industry."

The classroom module of the course begins with psychometric testing; simply a series of multiple choice questions which, with a trained interpreter, can reveal individuals' natural strengths and weaknesses. This allows people to identify what they want to focus on and aspects of themselves they want to develop.

WHEN DOES THE COURSE TAKE PLACE?

For those shortlisted, interviews will be held at the Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester, on 12 June. For the 12 selected scholars, the course takes place on:

- * A five-day, residential, mainly tutored course at the Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester, from 24-28 November 2008.

- * A four-day, project-based case study module at the Grosvenor Hotel, Stockbridge, Hampshire (JET's "spiritual" home), from 12-15 January 2009.

- * A second four-day case study module, again at Stockbridge, from 10-13 March.

WHAT WILL THE SCHOLARS LEARN?

James Jones is head of farm management at the Royal Agricultural College and runs the content of the course with dean of agriculture John Alliston.

"The scholars will learn more about themselves and where their strengths and weaknesses lie. They will learn more about a number of aspects of business management focused mainly, but not exclusively, on agriculture, with speakers from



Not all classroom-based – JET scholars spend most time out looking at real farm businesses.



GROWING YOUR SKILLS

* Growing your skills is a series of articles illustrating avenues for continuing professional development (CPD) in agriculture and related industries.

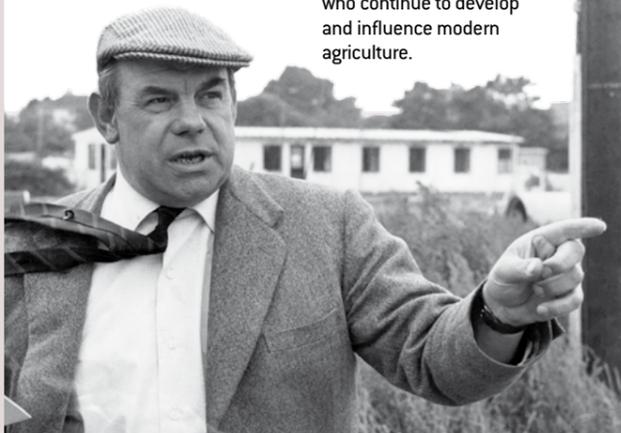
JOHN EDGAR AND HIS LEGACY

* John Edgar was born into a Hampshire farming family at New Milton, near the New Forest. His father died while John was still at school, but his mother carried on farming, developing a milk retailing business around New Milton and Lymington. This drive and independence clearly left an indelible impression on the young John.

He quickly established himself as a man whose abilities carried him far beyond the farm gate. The youngest chairman of his local NFU, he later represented

the county for the NFU in London. Involvement in agricultural development was extensive, with John serving with the Hampshire Cattle Breeders Society, the Agriculture Improvement Council and SCATS.

John's friends still speak of his warm personality and infectious energy, which drove him to promote excellence in farming and rural businesses. The John Edgar Trust, chaired by his widow since his sudden death, is a worthy legacy and has benefited nearly 250 people who continue to develop and influence modern agriculture.



PERSONAL VIEW

Ian Ashbridge

FARMERS WEEKLY BUSINESS EDITOR

* I was fortunate enough to be selected for the 2006-2007 John Edgar Trust scholarship, and, to be honest, I had no idea what to expect.

But I did feel I wanted to shake the dust off my CV, as I was going to be in a position where I was handling budgets and responsible for other members of staff. There were skills I needed to brush up on and skills I needed to learn from scratch.

The success of the JET experience is based a great deal on members of the group learning from each other, and it was only after the course that I began to realise how skilled the course directors were at assembling different groups or teams from among the scholars.

People are placed in groups purposefully with others whose characters will complement – or even clash – with other individuals. Teams are changed regularly throughout the course.

But the art lies in choosing the right combination of characters who will help each other learn to adopt different approaches to work together to solve a problem.

This is a valuable skill for anyone in their first responsible position – to learn about people, how to read their characters, attitudes and inclinations and how to put people together with others to make them work more effectively.

Whether you are doing this from a tractor cab or from a rural surveyor's office or even an agricultural media group, these skills are fundamental to effective management.

Obviously, no three-week course can turn you into an instant management star, but I do think more carefully before I approach people with tasks and think more sensitively about how individual people will deal with pressure and problems.

The John Edgar experience is capable not just of encouraging people to see the "bigger picture", but to change the way they think. It's a powerful and unique opportunity that also leads to valued friendships.

