



JOHN EDGAR TRUST

Spring 2022 Newsletter

A welcome from the chairman



As we welcome in the New Year, I would like to focus on the positives of the previous year. Despite the ongoing threat from Covid, the successful roll out of the vaccine programme has led to some signs of normality returning. For JET this meant we were able to host the 12 delegates on the usual three week course over the winter months as close to normality as we possibly could. It was lovely to meet with them all and finally be able to stage face to face meetings again, albeit with Covid protocols in place.

In the wider industry, we have faced challenging weather patterns, but have seen prices across many of the farming sectors remain strong throughout the year. Whilst issues such as climate change, trade negotiations and BPS reduction are ongoing topics of conversation, I feel positive that change will create opportunity and this will only serve to strength our industry.

I would like to wish everyone good health and all the best for the coming year!

George Hood, Chairman of JET Organising Committee



JET Course Update

Despite ongoing uncertainty surrounding COVID at the time, we are pleased to announce that the 2021-2022 course was successfully delivered, with the first two weeks based at the RAU Cirencester and the third week at Wallops Woods Holiday Cottages, Hampshire.

This year saw an excellent number of applications received with a very high calibre of people shortlisted for interviews back in July. After much deliberation by the interviewing panel, 12 successful candidates were chosen. The scholars were from a broad range of enterprises within agriculture and brought with them both experience and enthusiasm, which provided invaluable throughout the course. Enclosed with this newsletter are the pen portraits for each of the delegates.

THE **MORLEY** AGRICULTURAL FOUNDATION

We would like to take the opportunity to thank The Morley Agricultural Foundation (TMAF) for their generous donation towards the current course. Based on its own 800 hectare commercial farming operation, TMAF is a charity which supports and undertakes practical agricultural research and a wide range of educational projects - from school age to PhDs, and professional development for farmers and others. We are delighted that the link has been forged between our two organisations via former JET scholar and farm manager at Morley Farms Ltd David Jones.



John Edgar Trust

ENHANCING LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT SKILLS WITHIN AGRICULTURE AND THE LAND BASED INDUSTRIES

John Edgar – A celebration of an inspiring life

By John Parker

2021 marked 100 years since John Edgar was born, so it seems timely to look back at his life and how his career and involvement in agriculture helped to shape the JET course we have all been lucky enough to be part of.

John was born in May 1921 to Fred and Dorothy Edgar, who farmed in New Milton. When tragedy struck in 1933 with John's father passing away, Dorothy continued to push their farming business forwards, starting up a milk retailing business in the New Milton and Lymington areas.

John excelled at school both academically and in sport, playing scrum half in the 1st XV and wicket keeper in the Cricket 1st XI. This interest in sport remained with him throughout his life.

John's parents had never actively encouraged him into a farming career and on leaving full time education, he was articled to the Fareham firm of Austin and Wyatt with a view to carving a career as an estate agent. However, his love of the land was too strong and following a pupilship with Tom Parker, he returned home in 1941 to help run the 750 acre farming business and dairy retail business and the shops at Milford and Highcliff. During the challenging years of the Second World War, John quickly established himself as both an excellent farmer and businessman, with demands on his time ever increasing as he took on more and more public work.





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He became the youngest ever Chairman of the Brockenhurst Branch of the NFU and went on to become the Hampshire delegate at NFU headquarters in London. He also served as a member of the NFU Development Co Ltd and was a member of the Agricultural Improvement Council for England and Wales. He would have been destined for higher office, but indifferent health prevented him progressing further.

His passion for agricultural excellence and his commercial vision saw him as a founder member and Vice-Chairman of the Hampshire Cattle Breeders society and Chairman of the All-important Bull Selection Committee. He was later invited to be a member of the Hampshire Agricultural Executive Committee and soon Vice-Chairman of SCATS Ltd.

John recognised the value of knowledge transfer and promoting a strong farming community and was a founder member of the Central Council of Growmore Clubs. He played an active role in Growmore for many years and in recognition of his services was made an honorary Vice-President of his own Lymington Branch.

His attention turned to the Fareham and Hants Farmers Club and when President and Chairman of Council, he re-organised the existing format of the old show and Stallion Travelling Society to a modern club. The renowned Farms Competition benefited from his organising ability and such was the quality and standard of his own farming, on numerous occasions he featured as the champion for the best farm in Hampshire.



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John took a keen interest in a wide selection of agricultural clubs and societies both in Hampshire and the surrounding area. From his role as President of the New Milton Chamber of Trade and being a member of the Avon and Stour Agricultural Society to his role as Chairman of the Grasshoppers, his passion for agriculture was unquestionable. He also took a keen interest in the next generation entering farming, and had links to the Young Farmers organisation. Many would agree that the clubs and organisations John was involved in were lucky to have his support and wise council.

Sadly on 20th February 1970 John died suddenly, leaving behind his wife, Angela and their three children, Sally, James and Gillian. His friendship and the warmth of his infectious personality made him well loved, not only within the agricultural community, but within the county. His sudden death shocked the agricultural world and there was a deep expression of sympathy and support towards Angela and her young family.

John's perfection and attention to detail together, with his sound knowledge and good judgement made him an inspiration to all. He was a unique Hampshire farmer who inspired old and young, both during his life and following his death. He strove for excellence in everything that he did and set an example few could follow. To John, second best was not an option! He died a young man, at only 48, but during his lifetime he gave so much to the industry that he loved and set a fine example making him a legend in his own lifetime.

His enthusiasm and passion inspired his many farming friends to recognise his huge contribution to agriculture, resulting in the launch of a memorial appeal. Today we know this as the John Edgar Trust. The Trust has been an overwhelming success and has benefited countless young people starting on their agricultural career. The Trust is carrying on the legacy of John and I believe he would have been hugely proud of impact it has had within the farming industry.



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Life after JET – A farming career

By Chris Cook

My remit was “What did you gain from your JET experience”? Or possibly at my age, 71, what can you remember!

The answer to the first question is simple, confidence. This is vital in an exposed industry where everyone and their dog know nothing but feel compelled to share their ignorance with you. The answer to the second question is the talk from Derek Fowler, then manager of Broadlands, when he gave us the advice that in management “the first and most important thing is to manage your owner”.

His owner being Lord Mountbatten I felt that this was valuable advice, and it has certainly stood me in good stead over the years.

I was fortunate to start my agricultural career with an inspirational farmer in the Midlands who was growing OSR, tramlining, using liquid fertiliser, growing maize for beef, field trialling Roundup and much more; all cutting edge stuff in the mid 1970s. I was equally fortunate to be hired for my first management position by Pink, Donger & Lowry, land agents based in Winchester (although they later became part of Carter Jonas). They were great supporters of JET and put me forward, and paid for, the 1980-1981 course. The combination of the practical knowledge acquired during my training, and the applied theory from the JET course provided the two most important steppingstones for my career.

The JET course then was held over three months entirely at the Grosvenor Hotel in Stockbridge, on a Thursday, Friday and Saturday morning. Case studies resulted in routine evisceration, but taught you to think beyond the bare facts, and two particularly stand out. Firstly, why did a particular farm have so much late drilled spring barley and ongoing land sales?

The answers were that shooting was everything, plus drink bills, debt and divorce. Secondly, why did a relatively small acreage have a small dairy herd, sheep, beef and a small arable area when a flying herd and home-grown forage would be much more profitable? The answer this time was that father liked sheep, the dairy man was older and would not be able to find another job, and the son didn't like cows but did like shiny kit.





Life after JET – A farming career

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Looking beyond the bare facts has made me always question ‘why are we doing this?’, even when it was originally my idea.

Confidence allowed me to manage farms and estates of increasing size, undertake the Worshipful Company of Farmers Advanced Management Course, become a Freeman of the City of London and a Liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Farmers, and NFU County Chairman for Hampshire. The latter giving me an opportunity that I used to talk up farming when many within the industry said “keep your head down”. It also opened doors to engage with different groups of people, from those within the industry who are well versed on all things agricultural, to those with little farming knowledge, but eager to understand where food comes from. Confidence gained from the course allowed me to share my passion in agriculture with others and hopefully inspire the next generation.

As my farming career draws to a close, and I ask, ‘what did I get out of JET?’, I am able to look back on a long and fascinating, worthwhile and mostly enjoyable career that led to many unexpected opportunities, and of course lifelong friendships with fellow JET alumni.



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Women in Agriculture

By Anne Gow



JET has always offered equal opportunities for men and women, from all backgrounds; focusing on championing those with talent, enthusiasm and a drive to push the industry forwards. I was pleased to hear that the 2021 – 2022 course have almost achieved an equal balance of women and men. However, as an industry I feel we still have barriers to breakdown if we are to ensure a diverse and innovative workforce and a sustainable future.

The negative attitude, which has been dominant for so many years has historically restricted new entrants/women. Could it be argued that the industry's current staffing issues stem from the narrow view that an appropriate/suitable workforce should be mostly male and mostly 'home grown'? I believe that every new entrant's success, regardless of gender, is an achievement for Agriculture. Perhaps the next course will see even more women and new entrants from non-agricultural backgrounds gaining a place.

To explain further - Agriculture's attitude/behaviour has/does result in potential talent being lost to other industries. My early career ventured away from farming because I was discouraged as a child from entering Agriculture. The industry I entered was also male dominated but had a very different/progressive attitude towards new entrants, including women, and offered good career structure and opportunities. Whilst entry conditions were exacting (2 interviews plus 2 and 3-day residential assessments), success represented a world class, 6-month residential training course followed by career opportunities, with increasing responsibility, in the UK and Europe. I use many of the skills learnt in that industry to manage my farm business today. Bringing other industry skills and experience to agriculture is, I believe, a gain for farming.

Agriculture has the ability to offer wonderful opportunities, enabling the industry to attract a much broader pool of talent than currently. It is a diverse industry with plenty of natural assets to support innovation and creativity. With evolving business challenges – including climate change, environmental responsibility, detachment from food production and changing diet by consumers – the industry needs to attract the most talented, entrepreneurial people possible.

Change is needed in every farming business – both a change in attitude and behaviour, if we are to present our industry as an appealing career opportunity. Whilst there has been some progress, like other industries we must strive to continue improving and attracting the best and brightest to drive our industry forwards.

Every good manager is a positive outcome for Agriculture. Pioneering women who have 'made a difference' include **Caroline Drummond**, Chief Executive of LEAF, **Karen Mercer**, newly installed Master of the Worshipful Company of Farmers, **Minette Batters**, current NFU President, and **Christine Tacon**, ex-manager of Co-Op Group's farming business and current Red Tractor Chair. These are some of the current stars, but we still need more new entrants, including women, at grass roots to ensure a positive future. I do not believe this will happen whilst only a very small percentage of farm businesses are led by women and/or nurture women in management. However, in reality, this issue is not confined to the agricultural industry, but is a social challenge felt across all industries.



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Exeter University recently studied business attitudes in Agriculture, including succession planning. Their research discovered that women were only expected/planned to be leading around 17.3% of farm businesses in future years. New entrants weren't considered at all.

Tanya Robbins focused her Nuffield Scholarship on the work being done by successful businesswomen in Agriculture. She noted that the women she met had thrived in the industry by seeing an opportunity and being totally focussed on a way to reach their goal.

Leadership is important to every industry. I learnt many skills in my first industry through formal training and in-job mentoring. These have been added to over the years on courses such as Women in Agriculture, JET and Worshipful Company of Farmers. With an aim to learn something new every day, engagement with staff, customers, contractors and tenants adds icing to the skills cake! As a women, I believe that ongoing skills development is key to any successful career. Good leadership encourages respect, a stronger team and ultimately better/greater business outcomes.

Whilst there are increasing opportunities within agriculture for women and the next generation is far more open to women carrying out farming roles, it remains that there are still many barriers. Communication is key to changing attitudes – the ability to listen, exchange ideas and include others in decision making is an important part of the JET course; skills many women are adept at.

The key skill that was honed on my JET course was confidence – at the end of the programme I bought a small farm and have since been creating an environmentally aware and sensitively managed rural enterprise. Biodiversity and sustainability are at the heart of what I and my tenants do. The farm's biodiversity has been largely developed on the back of business success, not grants/subsidies. My business aims include opportunities for budding entrepreneurs, educating the next generation in access to the countryside and opening their eyes to the possibilities of being involved in agriculture, or at the very least understanding where their food comes from.

The National Curriculum, at every Key Stage, includes learning about our planet. For children, caring for our planet is an integral part of their early years schooling. What other industry has so much connection to national education? The Agricultural industry has a significant opportunity to engage with every child and welcome talent. I hope that my work will continue to inspire the next generation to join our industry and bring the much needed creativity, new thinking and strong work ethics to help push our industry forwards.

New Entrants and women are different and can bring skills and a different view point which will not only challenge but enhance our industry. We need to continue to expand our search for young talent to ensure we are encouraging the best and brightest to make our industry as valued and well regarded as others in this country.



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JET – Diary Dates & Information

JET alumni dinner

Regrettably the alumni dinner which would normally have been held in the last week of the course was not able to take place due to the uncertainty surrounding COVID at the time.

This event will be planned for later in 2022.

Details of a revised date will be sent out in due course.



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