

Jack Hopkins

I am now nearing the completion of my second year at the Royal Agricultural College and the time has really flown.

The beginning of the second year was very busy with many challenging modules which I was examined in January and February. I am still crossing my fingers that these are all ok and find out the results at the beginning of July.

If you can remember my last report in 2009 finished up by mentioning my girlfriend and I were entering the National Federation of Young Farmers Clubs' Farm Business Development Competition which is sponsored by the Tenant Farmers Association and Savills and was held at the last ever Royal show. I am pleased to inform you that we won after competing with some tough competition. The challenge was to tender for a fictional tenancy on an actual 185 hectares dairy and arable farm in Northamptonshire. Our business plan was to milk 1000 goats and to produce goat meat from the farm whilst requiring a low capital investment. This award included being given two tickets to the Oxford Farming Conference in January where we really entered into policy debate and development within the industry. We have also been asked to be judges for this years Business Development Competition. As well as this we were also featured in the Farmers Weekly on an article based on getting young entrants into the farming industry. All this experience has enhanced my realisation of how the industry is developing both within the UK and globally.

During the summer of 2009, I was employed by Cirencester Park Farms for harvest 2009. This is a 3,000 acre arable unit where I was able to gain more practical experience away from the family farm environment. The farm manager was a lady which presented a different dimension. I worked long hours which were rewarded with either a fish or pie supper on the hoof!! I really enjoyed my time at Cirencester Park Farms and came away with some new ideas on how to run a successful farming enterprise.

Throughout the year I have taken the opportunity to carry out some valuable additional courses which the award from The Bowyer Trust has helped to finance. These courses included the DVLA car trailer towing licence, an All-terrain vehicle course and a chainsaw course all of which I can report were passed. These courses have highlighted the safe and appropriate operation skills requirement and they will be hugely important within my future career in agriculture.

November saw me thinking about how to spend my sixth month placement which was to begin in April 2010. I applied to British Sugar for possible employment in China where it is helping to develop the growing of sugar beet. This is an area in which I had little experience, but which is proving to be an extremely interesting learning opportunity. I was interviewed by British Sugar and then a week before Christmas I was very fortunate to be flown to China for a four day familiarisation visit. I accepted the employment offer and then on 3rd April I flew to Beijing with a further 3 hour drive North to a town called Zhangbei, where I am now based. My role so far has been in assisting the preparation and establishment of a sugar beet crop on some 200 hectares. It has included also the demonstration of good machine operation skills to Chinese operators. As well as this I have also been assisting with some very important trial work that is taking place this year which I have found very interesting and hope to use one particular trial for my dissertation in my final year. The experience has been amazing and the sights that I see from day to day will stay with me for a life time. With the Chinese population increasing and changing to a more western diet there is an increasing need for sugar. When we arrived snow was on the ground. Planting was late but the dramatic sudden changes in weather means that in a small time window we have planted all the trials and so far all is looking good. All in all it is a wonderful experience. I'm home in July for a break then back to China until September before returning to the UK to start my last year at Cirencester.

Once again I would like to thank The Bowyer Trust for its generous award to me. I have used your award to help finance my trailer test and additional skills competence tests which are now essential requirements to progress within the agricultural industry.