

Geraint Powell

Undertaking AHDB-funded Nuffield Scholarship

I have just returned from my first Nuffield travels to Brazil, Chile, Washington DC, Kentucky, Canada and the Netherlands. The trip to Brazil was for the Contemporary Scholars' Conference which is a chance for the 70 new scholars from all over the world to meet and get to know each other. We had an intense ten-day schedule learning about the agri, social and political situation of this vast country. Brazil is a global powerhouse in commodity production and has the potential to increase output considerably with more land available and adopting more innovation and technology. However, this potential has always been stifled by lack of investment in infrastructure, a continuing unstable political situation and the difficulty of businesses to access credit.



After the conference in Brazil, nine other international scholars and I departed on a Global Focus Programme, taking in five countries in six weeks. We experienced a broad range of agricultural systems in very different political and social environments. First stop was Chile, which none of us had been to before and we were all very impressed. We visited some very progressive businesses with an emphasis on assurance, quality and price competitiveness which are all very important to an economy based primarily on exports. Chile's primary export commodities include copper, fruit, fish products, wine and chemicals, with its main export partners being China, USA, Japan, Brazil and South Korea.

The next stop was Washington DC for four days of meetings with organisations such as the US Department for Agriculture (USDA), Farm Bureau Service and various Government officials. The talk of the town was the presidential election and the agricultural sector's biggest concerns being global trade agreements and the ability to continue to use migrant labour under the new President. The farm support system is a hot topic in the US at the moment, with the USDA funding initiatives such as crop insurance and cheap loans (\$25billion per year) to protect their farmers from volatile prices and extreme weather conditions.

A quick flight took us to the State of Kentucky to meet our hosts for the week at the University of Kentucky. We had a great week meeting farmers and businesses in this very diverse State, where the main activities are poultry, corn, beef cattle and tobacco. There is also a large industry breeding thoroughbred race horses.

We then drove north to Canada, to Prince Edward Island (PEI). As we drove over the Confederation bridge the sea water in the Northumberland Strait was frozen which gave the Australians in the group a chance to have their first snowball fight. Potatoes, arable, fruit and beef are the main agricultural activities as well as a large lobster industry. There are still quota schemes in place for many agricultural products in Canada. They protect farmers with consistent prices and impose large tariffs on imported goods, in turn the consumer pays more but they don't seem to mind. This system seemed logical, protecting farmers from cheap imports from their large neighbours in the south, but there was growing concern that production was being held by the privileged few which was impeding young entrants. There was a great feeling of community spirit on the island and a real pride in the strong PEI brand that has been developed over many years.

After the US and Canada, we visited the Netherlands. At a sixth of a size of the UK and a population of 17 million, it is a small country that thinks big. It is intensive, efficient and productive which is quite impressive for its size. Due to its fertile soil and smart solutions, it is the second-largest exporter of agri-food products (70% of its total production) in the world, after the US. We saw dairy, egg laying, intensive and extensive pigs, R&D institutes, potatoes and horticulture. The Dutch farmers have been under environmental and animal welfare pressure for many years and that is getting more intense with rising phosphate levels, sinking peat and huge pressure from animal rights lobbyists. The political party, Party for the Animals, has been successful in winning five of the 150 seats in the House of Representatives and one of the objectives is to decrease the number of farmed animals by 70%. The party considers itself to be a testimonial party, which does not seek to gain political power, but only to testify its beliefs and thereby influence other parties.

There were common themes across the countries visited:

- Capital intensity of land values (eg Netherlands 60000 euros/ha)
- Falling commodity prices and the inevitable race to the bottom
- The growing gap between primary producers and consumers
- The role of NGOs and their influence on society (eg fake news)



Watch out for more updates on Geraint's Nuffield Scholarship in future editions of Grazing Club