

STUDY TOUR to CALIFORNIA - October 2011

Travers Powell, Agronomy Lecturer, Tocal Agricultural College, Paterson. NSW

Purpose:

Following my visit, last year, to study agricultural education in California, I was impressed by the high enrolment rates in agriculture courses at Californian High Schools, Colleges and Universities. The aim of this trip was to discover why so many students chose to study agriculture at all levels of education and propose strategies that may encourage students, in Australia, to choose agriculture as a career option and choose to study agriculture courses at schools, colleges and universities.

The process:

Prior to my trip, I made arrangements to meet up with a range of professional people in agriculture. These people included farm managers, farm owners, University Professors, High School teachers and the Executive Director of the Californian Agriculture Teachers Association.

The interviews:

1. **Bill Kellogg**, Professor of Agricultural Education & Communication at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. (My visit was on 30/9/11)

Bill pointed out a few important facts, prior to discussing why CalPoly had very high enrolments in agriculture related courses:

- ☞ California is the 7th largest economy in the World, so it is a very prosperous State, with good job opportunities.
- ☞ The number 1 industry in California is agriculture, so it is a big employer.
- ☞ There is a lot of community support for agriculture, in California, so there is a lot of pressure put on the government to support agricultural education.



Bill also gave his views on why, in 2010, there were approximately 70,000 students studying agriculture in Californian schools:

- ☞ Students can meet the California High School Graduation Requirements, in Science and Visual Arts, by doing certain agriculture subjects. For example, Agricultural Biology has the same academic standing as Biology and Floral Design can substitute for Visual Arts. Students sit a common Biology exam but the students studying Agricultural Biology have much higher marks than students studying mainstream Biology, because the Agricultural Biology is taught in an applied context. This flexibility allows students to choose agriculture and meet the requirements to enter Colleges.
- ☞ Many schools have taken Industrial Arts out their curriculum, because of the high cost of running the subjects. Agriculture teachers, being very resourceful, have taken over the Industrial Arts buildings and added additional subjects, such as Cold Metal Workshop, Hot Metal Workshop, Building Construction, Small Motors etc to the range of subjects taught.
- ☞ The large population growth in California, particularly in agricultural regions, is driving education growth.

Bill also suggested that the Community College system was important to boosting University enrolments:

- ☞ Community Colleges prepare students for work.
- ☞ Students gain credit points towards University degrees, from College courses.
- ☞ There is a lot of community pressure on Community Colleges to provide agriculture courses.

Besides the interest in agricultural studies, created by schools and Community Colleges, Bill suggested 3 reasons why CalPoly, in particular, had very high enrolments:

- ☞ The location of San Luis Obispo, close to the beaches, and it's climate make it a very pleasant place to study.
- ☞ CalPoly has a very good reputation as a provider of high quality education. In 2010, there were 126 applicants for 32 positions in the Ag teacher training course.
- ☞ CalPoly has an Agriculture Ambassador Program, where students and graduates help promote agriculture courses, at CalPoly. The Agriculture Ambassadors are spread all over the United States, in Universities, Colleges, High Schools and industry. Their main role is to talk to prospective students, give campus tours, and visit schools, colleges, trade shows and FFA events to promote CalPoly.

2. **Josh Ruiz**, Lettuce Production Manager at Tanimura and Antle, a vertically integrated 30,000 acre salad and vegetable enterprise. Josh is also co-owner of Twisted Roots vineyard, at Lodi CA. (I met up with Josh on 2/10/11).

I had discussions with Josh about agricultural job opportunities, in California. Josh mentioned that it was difficult to find young people to work on their farms and, so, relied on local Mexican residents to do most of the manual work, such as picking, on the farms. The difficulty in sourcing young people to work on their farms can be attributed to:

- ☞ Many young Californians aspire to gaining University degrees and are not prepared to take lower paid, manual jobs.
- ☞ Many young people lack a decent work ethic and are not prepared to put in a hard days work.
- ☞ Most of the work required is seasonal, which is not an attractive option for young people looking to develop a career in agriculture.

Josh mentioned that Tanimura & Antle were an excellent company to work for. They look after their workers very well and pay them a good wage. Besides the management team, they have about 8 full-time farm employees who operate the various farms and over 150 full-time staff in other sections of the operation.

Tanimura & Antle also provide a **College Level Internship Program**, which has a long history of providing junior and senior level college students the opportunity to continue their agricultural education in a real world environment.



3. **Dr. Jim Aschwenden** is the Executive Director of the California Agricultural Teachers' Association (since 1993). Prior to that, he taught at the high school level for 17 years, predominately in the areas of Agricultural Science and Agricultural Economics. (I met up with Jim on 5 & 6/10/11).



I asked Jim for his views on why so many students choose to enrol in agriculture courses at High School. There were a number of reasons but two, in particular, were significant. About 20-30 years ago, Jim and other Ag teachers, lobbied for the following changes to occur:

- ☞ The FFA program, in California, was integrated into the Agriculture curriculum, so that agriculture programs included the FFA ideals of leadership, industry experience and communication. This meant that students who wanted to participate in FFA activities, had to enrol in agriculture classes.
- ☞ Mainstream subjects, required for California High School Graduation Requirements, could be studied in an agricultural context. As mentioned previously, Agricultural Biology has the same academic standing as Biology and Floral Design can substitute for Visual Arts etc. This meant that students could study agriculture and still meet the graduation requirements.

With these two things in place, it was far more attractive for students to study practical-based agriculture subjects and meet the graduation requirements to enter university. Jim also mentioned why the FFA was important for high enrolments in high school agriculture:

- ☞ Being a member of the FFA is something that many students aspire to.
- ☞ Many parents are the product of FFA programs and are very encouraging and supportive of their children also being in the FFA.
- ☞ There is strong community support for agriculture and, in particular, the FFA.
- ☞ The competition aspect of FFA is popular with students. There is a wide variety of FFA competitions, which include: showing livestock, livestock judging, agricultural pests, farm machinery, public speaking, parliamentary procedure and many more.
- ☞ FFA members are required to do a project, with many members choosing to raise and show livestock. Some choose to build farm equipment. Others may choose simpler projects. This is probably the most popular aspect of being an FFA member.
- ☞ FFA has a strong leadership component. The California FFA Integrated Leadership Development Plan is a unique leadership training model. The integrated leadership program uses a building block approach to developing leadership skills. Each conference builds on the previous one. In doing so, each succeeding activity calls on participants to reach, stretch, and develop achievements as they progress through the program. The California FFA Integrated Leadership Program consists of: Greenhand Conference, Made for Excellence Conference, Advanced Leadership Academy and Sacramento Leadership Experience. The Greenhand Conference provides a mix of FFA knowledge, leadership training, and fun to first year University FFA members.

4. **Katherine Kellogg**, Forestry Instructor at Modesto Junior College. Katherine teaches the Modesto Jr. College Forestry & Natural Resources program and uses the Kinland Forest Farm, at Twain-Harte, as an instructional laboratory. This association between a private landholder and an educational institution provides learning opportunities that would not be possible through pure classroom teaching. Kinland Forest Farm is owned by Mr. Bob Kinsinger. (My visit was on 9 & 10/10/11)

Bob Kinsinger, now 91 years of age, owns the 430 acre Kinland Forest Farm, which is set up as a demonstration, sustainable timber farm. In 2007, Bob was named the 2007 Tree Farmer of the Year by the Forest Landowners of California. Michael Fischer and Katherine Kellogg are caretakers of the Kinland Forest Farm, looking after the management and selective harvesting of trees.



Bob Kinsinger was Vice President of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, from June 1966 – September 1984 (18 years 4 months) and was instrumental in the creation and expansion of community colleges. Bob's early association with the WK Kellogg Foundation can be found at:

<http://www.aacc.nche.edu/Resources/leadership/Documents/LegacyOfLeadership.pdf>



Katherine Kellogg in the classroom, provided by Bob Kinsinger, at Kinland Forest.

5. **Dr. Steven Rocca**, Assistant Professor, Agricultural Education, California State University Fresno. Unfortunately, despite my best attempts, I was not able to catch up with Steve during my stay in Fresno (11/10/2011). I emailed Steve, with the following question: “I’d like to get your thoughts on why there are so many students studying agriculture related subjects in High School, the Community Colleges and at the Universities. In particular, I’d like to find out how Fresno State University manages to attract good student enrolments in Ag courses. I had a quick look at the Fresno Ag Ambassadors Facebook page and the Jordan page, but I’d be very interested in how the Ambassadors program actually works.”

Below is Steve’s response:

“I’m really sorry I missed visiting with you and your wife when you were on campus. I’m glad you found the farm market, wouldn’t want you to miss our ice cream.”

To address your questions, I think students get involved in agricultural education in our country for a couple different reasons. A few of them were like me, I grew up on a farm and always wanted to be involved in agriculture. This type of kid is easy to figure out. The difficult ones are figuring out how kids from urban areas get interested in our program. I think most of the time it can be attributed to the Ag Education program and all its components. The Future Farmers organization and the Supervised Agricultural Experience program are really what make our program unique in the U.S. education system. No other subject or vocational area utilize this model as well as those in Ag. Education. When I was teaching high school agriculture I had students from all different backgrounds that took my classes so they could be involved in the FFA and exhibit livestock at our fairs/expositions. Most of my students seem to seek out opportunities to have fun, travel, make money, make friends and be successful. FFA and our SAE program provides all of these opportunities to all students. For a student who isn’t very athletic, they could be as successful or even more than the star of our football team. Another key feature of our programs is its emphasis on hands-on learning. I found that I had a few students who struggled in just about every class they had except mine. When I gave them the opportunity to learn by doing, they would excel. I think our success with our College of Ag Ambassador program also shares some of the same causes. We offer students the opportunity to be a part of our College, travel, meet people, have fun, and feel like an important member and representative of our College. We don’t offer them much, just 2 elective units and provide them with their Ambassador shirt. They volunteer for at least 30 hours helping with our recruitment events or with other community service projects. I’m amazed at the number of students that have joined our Ambassador team. It is a lot like FFA, our kids are always looking to belong to something and like being with a group of students that share their interest in agriculture.”

Steve Rocca and
myself in 2010



6. **Shay Williams-Hopper.** Agriculture teacher at the Tulare Joint Union High School District Farm. Shay has been recognised, by her peers, as an outstanding agriculture teacher. In 2009, Shay was the Western Region winner of the covenant Outstanding Young Member Award presented by the National Association of Agriculture Educators. Shay teaches Agricultural Biology, Floriculture and Vet Science.
(My visit was on 12 & 13/10/11)

I asked Shay for her views on why so many students choose to enrol in agriculture courses at the Tulare High Schools (Tulare Joint Union High School, Tulare Western High School and Mission Oak High School). Her response:

- ☞ Tulare is situated in a highly productive agriculture and horticulture region. This not only provides students from farm backgrounds, but also provides work experience opportunities in agriculture/horticulture for the students. Shay mentioned that schools in non-agricultural regions often struggled to attract large numbers of students to study agriculture.
- ☞ There is huge support from parents and the community for agricultural education. Many parents and community members are past FFA members and encourage their children to be part of the FFA, through studying agriculture.
- ☞ Students want to be part of the FFA, so that they can compete, travel, develop leadership skills and be part of a well recognised national organisation. They can only be a member of the FFA, in California, by studying agriculture.
- ☞ Agriculture teachers are popular with students because of the after hours activities that they are involved with, such as preparation of livestock for FFA competitions.
- ☞ A broad range of subjects are taught in the agriculture area (such as Floral Design, Ag Biology, Ag Business, Vet Science, Ag Government, Ag Chemistry) which have the equivalent standing as mainstream subjects for university entrance. Students choose these subjects because they are more 'applied' and practical.
- ☞ Studying agriculture subjects (such as Agricultural Science, Plant Science, Metal Fabrication, Building Construction, Small Engines, Agricultural Power and Equipment, Agricultural Mechanics, Ornamental Agriculture, Floral Design, Agricultural Business Management, Agricultural Leadership, FFA Sheep, FFA Swine, FFA Dairy, FFA Beef, Agricultural Mathematics, Agricultural Biology, Vet Science etc) gives students useful practical skills that are sought after by employers.



Ryan & Shay Hopper

7. **Ryan Hopper.** Owner/manager of Hopper Farms, a family owned, 130 acre citrus farm growing Navel Oranges, Valencia Oranges, Blood Oranges, Tangelos, and Mandarins. It has been in the Hopper family for since the mid 1930's and Ryan is the third generation on the farm.

Due to the small nature of the farm, Ryan provides the bulk of the labour requirement of the farm, with his brother-in-law employed as a part-time worker and his mother as part-time book keeper. Tree pruning, spraying and picking are all out sourced to contractors. The citrus packing house is responsible for contracting labour for the harvest. Most of the contract labour force are immigrant workers, who settle in the area, but they find it difficult to get second and third generations to be farm labourers (this is partly due to the fact that their parents want them to get a higher education and have better lives than themselves, and then there are others who choose to live off the welfare system and not work at all).

Ryan mentioned that many of the people who are studying agriculture in school find employment in many different avenues. Most are not going to college to learn how to farm. Those attending the Junior Colleges (2 year) typically are trying to gain vocational skills so they can take those skills and get a "career" with them, for example, as a Certificated welder, floral designer, registered vet technician. Those going to 4 year colleges (Calpoly & Fresno State Universities) are trying to attain jobs that are science based, educational, or business based. These students are working as loan officers, Pest Control Advisors, Teachers, Chemical and Fertilizer Reps, Nutritional Feed Sales Advisors, Wine Making, etc. Some get hired as farm managers for large corporate farms (Paramount Citrus for example), because of their education.

SUMMARY

The size of the Californian economy and the fact that agriculture is the largest sector in that economy, means that there will be a natural interest to study agriculture at High School, Community College and University. But there is more to the popularity of agriculture, as a subject choice, than the obvious scale of this sector. Educational institutions work hard, and smart, at attracting students to their faculty, through community support, the integration of the FFA program into their syllabi and the active promotion of the subject, through the University Agriculture Ambassador programs.

There is also a clear link between studying agriculture-related courses at High School, Community College and the State Universities. Similar subjects are taught at all levels of education, which allows students to develop interest, knowledge and skills in High School which will be useful at College and University.

The Californian Agriculture teachers pay a set annual fee to the Californian Agriculture Teachers' Association (CATA). CATA employ an Executive Director, who's role it is to promote and improve the teaching of agriculture in California by being actively involved in a range of relevant committees at education and state government level. This unencumbered role has allowed the CATA Executive Officer the time and resources to make significant beneficial changes to Californian Agricultural education.

Some suggestions to encourage young Australians to choose agriculture as a career.

It's a difficult task to promote agriculture as a viable career path with the constraints of low wages, long hours and hard work, particularly in light of the mining sector offering lots of jobs and high wages. We are now seeing a higher proportion of females studying agriculture at Agricultural Colleges and Universities and many of them are now from non-agricultural backgrounds.

Despite this, agriculture still provides a rewarding and challenging career with opportunities to make a significant income, in farm management, share farming and various agri-business activities. We need to "sell" agriculture in terms of the lifestyle and potential income.

Below, are some suggestions that may improve the number of students studying agriculture in NSW:

- We need an agricultural organization, outside of the education system, to promote agricultural education and agriculture, as a viable career option, to gain support from within the agricultural industry, education systems and governments. If we can lobby governments and education bureaucracies to value agricultural education and support agricultural education with the provision of better resources, facilities, training and curriculum options, then there is a strong possibility that students will see value in pursuing agriculture related courses and careers. We also need farmers and agri-businesses to provide opportunities for young people to get a start in agriculture. This is an area where the NSW Farmers Association and National Farmers Federation could be more active.
- The agricultural sector needs to "sell" itself to the younger generation as a viable career option. At the present time, the mining industry is promoting itself as an environmentally caring industry, with stimulating challenges and great career opportunities, through their TV advertising programs. This may be an expensive advertising campaign, but it gives out the right messages and it may provide a hint as to what the agricultural sector could do. The Californian agriculture sector is very good at promoting itself, such as the recently introduced Cal Ag license plate (<https://secure.cdfa.ca.gov/egov/calagplate>) – *"When you show your support for California agriculture with the purchase of a special interest license plate you are investing in the next generation of our ag industry's innovators, entrepreneurs, and leaders."* We need to be more pro-active in promoting the agricultural industry.
- A lot can be gained by adopting a similar structure to the Californian Agriculture Teachers' Association and employing a person to work with Education Departments, State Governments and the Federal Government to bring about positive changes in agricultural education.
- There would be great benefit in encouraging younger students, at Primary School, to become more active in agricultural competitions. In California, the 4-H Youth Development Program is similar to the FFA program, but operates outside of the school program and starts at a much younger age – it also has a huge following. Maybe, the Rural Youth program could be reinvigorated or reinvented to 'spark' more interest in agriculture.

- The Ag Ambassadors model, used by CalPoly and Fresno State Universities, could provide agricultural training institutions, like Tocal College, with a formula to increase awareness of agricultural courses and career opportunities. Tocal has a strong ex-students association, many co-operating farmers and strong industry links. An Agriculture Ambassadors Program may provide an effective promotional tool to encourage more school students to choose to study agriculture at Tocal College and go on to develop a successful career in agriculture.
 - The School Farm model used at Tulare, where 3 High Schools use the one agricultural farm, could be a cost effective model for large towns with several high schools. The school farm has permanent, specialist agriculture teachers who only teach at the School Farm. One group of Agriculture teachers and only one comprehensive, well resourced school farm, for 2-4 schools, would improve the opportunities for students studying agriculture.
 - A more diverse agricultural curriculum, similar to the Californian model, with the flexibility to study core subjects in an agricultural context (eg. Agricultural Biology) may create a greater interest in the subject. Given the tight curriculum structures in schools, this may be an impractical suggestion.
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Attachments.

1. Ag Ambassadors Program at CalPoly
2. Ag Ambassadors Program at Fresno State University
3. Jim Aschwanden: Executive Director of the California Agricultural Teachers' Association
4. California Agriculture Special Interest License Plate
5. Tanimura & Antle

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The Mission of the Agriculture Ambassadors ::

The Agriculture Ambassadors is an organization made up of students whose purpose is to act as a public relations branch of the College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences. The 2009-2010 academic year will be the twenty first year of existence for the Agriculture Ambassadors. The Agriculture Ambassadors have been a positive influence on the quantity as well as the quality of applicants for admission to CAFES.

The mission of the Agriculture Ambassadors fits into three specific ideas:

- :: Encouraging high school and junior college students to pursue a higher education
- :: Cultivating individuals in their pursuit of agriculture as a career and a lifestyle
- :: Sharing the multitude of opportunities Cal Poly's College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences offers.

Through personal experiences, the Agriculture Ambassadors promote these three ideals throughout California and the United States.

http://jcast.csufresno.edu/outreach_programs/ag_ambassadors.aspx



Ag Ambassadors

The purpose of the Agricultural Ambassadors is to...

- 1) promote higher education;
- 2) promote the Jordan College of Agricultural Sciences and Technology and all its majors;
- 3) promote California State University, Fresno; and
- 4) promote agricultural literacy.

These are to be accomplished through the active recruitment of high school and community college students, by California State University, Fresno students whose major is within the Jordan College of Agricultural Sciences and Technology.

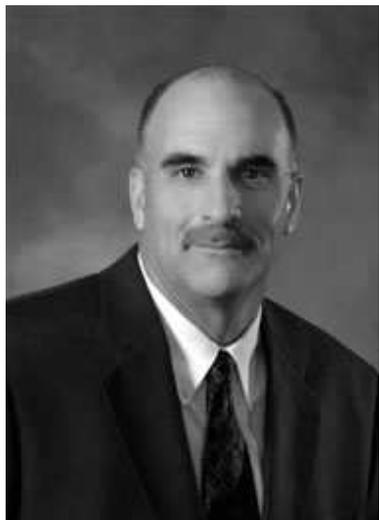
Our Ambassador Goals

- 1) Present our College and University in a positive manner;
- 2) Provide quality presentations in classrooms state-wide;
- 3) Maintain positive attitudes & team relations;
- 4) Present well planned, organized events;
- 5) Visit major community college agriculture programs;
- 6) Target local high school agriculture programs;
- 7) Plan and present informative outreach events;
- 8) Update and improve JCAST outreach booth display;
- 9) Build solid relationships through collaboration with faculty; and
- 10) Have fun!

If you are interested in becoming a part of the Ambassador team, please email

Dr. Steven Rocca.

Dr. James D. Aschwanden



Contact:
State Board of Education
1430 N Street, Room 5111
Sacramento, CA 95814

Took Office: October 31, 2006
Term Expires: January 15, 2012

Jim Aschwanden has served as the Executive Director of the California Agricultural Teachers' Association since 1993. Prior to that, he taught at the high school level for 17 years, predominately in the areas of Agricultural Science and Agricultural Economics.

A native of the Central Valley, he graduated from Fresno State University in 1975 with a B.S. in Agricultural Business Management, and later received a Masters in Education from the University of California, Davis. During his teaching tenure, he served on the Steering Committee for the State Agricultural Education Curriculum Project, was the primary author of the Agribusiness Management Cluster Course Project, and in 1991 was selected as the National Agri-Science Teacher of the Year by the National FFA Organization.

He has also served on the Dean's Advisory Committee for the College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences at the University of California, Davis, the California State Plan for Vocational and Technical Education Advisory Committee, the Community College Chancellor's Office Agricultural Education Advisory Committee, and has served two terms as a member of his local High School Governing Board. He currently serves on advisory councils for Cal Poly State University, San Luis Obispo and Chico State University.

In addition, he has served as Vice-Chair of the Vocational Alliance, a consortium of educational organizations supporting Career and Technical Education, for the past several years. In September 2006, he was appointed to the State Board of Education by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

California Agriculture Special Interest License Plate

<https://secure.cdfa.ca.gov/egov/calagplate/>



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[Frequently Asked Questions >](#)

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- Agricultural Education
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- Agricultural Career Training
- Youth Leadership Development



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Questions? Comments? Contact CalAgPlate@cdfa.ca.gov or call **1-916-654-0462**. [Privacy Notice](#)



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