



**Australian Rural  
Leadership Foundation**  
Leadership Impact  
Case Study:  
Industry Scholarship



Australian  
**Rural Leadership**  
Foundation







As part of an industry that contributes nearly 30% of the total gross value of agricultural production in Australia, grain producers are nothing if not innovative and demand driven, often in the face of challenging markets and trying weather.



For the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC), these factors make it vitally important to ensure industry is well connected by leaders willing to make the most of the opportunities in front of them, and work to overcome the challenges in their way.

For 25 years, the GRDC has made an annual investment by sponsoring a participant scholarship/s for an industry achiever to take part in Australia's longest and most in-depth experiential leadership program offered by the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation.

For Victorian producers and Australian Rural Leadership Program (ARLP) graduates Susan Findlay Tickner, Ashley Fraser, and David Jockinke,

their GRDC sponsored places to complete the program has delivered significant collective gain for their industry and own regional communities, but also for their own individual growth on farm and at home.

And despite completing the program in separate cohorts, each say they graduated with the confidence and skills to take on leadership positions within the grain industry - including roles with the GRDC and the Victorian Farmers Federation - and gave them the capacity to encourage others to develop their own leadership potential to take on roles that foster stronger communities and sustainable agriculture.





## Susan Findlay Tickner

Horsham, Victoria. Farmer, communications professional.

ARLP Course 14: 2007/2008

Susan grew up on a dairy farm at Flinders, on the Mornington Peninsula and with her family, operates a 3,500ha dry-land cropping enterprise near Horsham. She has served on the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) Southern Panel, and is currently working with renewable energy developer, RES, in communications and engagement.

Upon completing the 12-month Wimmera Leadership course with a background in grain growing and a desire to continue with formal leadership training, it made sense for Susan to apply for a GRDC sponsored place in the ARLP.

"The Wimmera Leadership course gave me the confidence to apply for ARLP and ultimately that program is the reason I hold the positions I do today," she said.

"The experience was unforgettable and valuable in so many ways and pushed me to consider the world in a different way."

Susan's cohort undertook sessions overseas in India, as well as Sydney, Tasmania, Adelaide, and the Kimberley.

"We worked with homeless people in Sydney and in Tasmania we undertook a case study examining the impact of forestry on the environment," Susan said.

"During our time in Sydney we worked with homeless people and on one evening I found myself sharing pizza on a beach with a tattoo covered, drug addicted teenager who shared a candid and honest account of her plight, and the hopelessness of her situation, which really hit a chord with me.

"The fact that some young people saw no value in their own lives prompted me to reassess the world."

But it was the tireless commitment of those determined to help them that had the greatest impact on Susan.

"That was a turning point for me in the program and once it was complete, I was confident to start to take on leadership roles in various industry and community groups, including the GRDC," Susan said.

"Partially driven by the need to support the industry that had supported me, I also realised that I now had the skills to enable change, including the ability to recognise the needs of others and advocate on their behalf."

Over the past decade, Susan has worked with the Wimmera Health Care Group, the Hawkesbury Institute for the Environmental Advisory Board, and the Centre for Agricultural Engineering – all roles that are fundamentally based around improving the health and wellbeing of those in regional communities, and of regional communities themselves.



She is now using her science communication skills to promote renewable energy, all the time drawing on the skills of empathetic listening and understanding of the lived experiences and viewpoints of others developed during the ARLP course.

“These skills are an asset when dealing with any project that may involve different sectors of the community, with diverse opinions and beliefs,” Susan said.

“I am a strong believer in inclusivity, in considering people from different socio-economic backgrounds and nationalities, but I am particularly passionate about women supporting women,” she said.

“By serving as a role model within agriculture, renewable energy, health and natural resource management, I am acutely aware of the fact that I can set an example for other women keen to embark on their own leadership journey for the betterment of their community, industry and self.”



















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## David Jochinke

Murra Warra, Victoria. 3rd Generation farmer. Agri politics.

ARLP Course 18: 2011/2012

On a farm 30km north of Horsham, in the Wimmera district of Victoria, David Jochinke is combining grain and sheep farming with Agri politics – helping to form a future for the industry he is passionate about. For more than a decade he was heavily involved with the local Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) Wallup district, which led to higher executive roles as VFF treasurer 2010-2011, and as vice-president from 2012 - 2016. In 2016, he became VFF president and in 2017 National Farmers Federation (NFF) vice-president.

A third-generation farmer with his heart firmly ensconced in the land he works with; circumstance and history have moulded David into a leader.

Following in the footsteps of his grandfather, who took up a soldier settler block after World War II, he is also tracking his father, who managed the land until illness made it necessary for David to take up the reins as an 18-year-old high school graduate.

"I have a passion for farming and agriculture is still an industry which offers huge opportunity. It is vibrant with so many facets," he said.

Determined to continue to learn while "making the decisions and managing the cheque book" on the farm, David also studied full-time at Longerenong, graduating with a Diploma of Applied Science.

That education laid the groundwork work that saw David grow to be an adopter of technology, using the latest techniques and applications to make his property more sustainable, and ensure others see fit to see the advantages of building a full circle, sustainable industry.

His GRDC sponsored place in the 2011 ARLP intake enabled him to combine his knowledge of global agricultural systems with effective leadership skills – a combination of assets that's continued to prove handy both on the farm and in the board room.

"When it was suggested I apply, I was reluctant because I didn't think I was leadership material, but I can say now that it's a life changing experience that I have never regretted," David said.

"The program took us to India, the Kimberley and other parts of Australia offering challenges of different kinds, and really expanded our leadership potential by exposing us to different elements of being a leader.

"I have always been action oriented, not process oriented but the experience in the Kimberley reinforced the importance of process," he said.

"By taking the time to consider situations, actions and outcomes, people were kept safe and goals were still achieved – that's an important lesson in leadership."

David said the experience, which involved physical and emotional trials, gave him a better understanding of his own limits and the limits of others.



"The whole program really contributed towards making me more aware of people and situations, as well as being more adaptable," he said.

"These are really important skills if you want people to walk beside you and choose to take on the same goal.

"With the skills I developed through the ARLP I know how to do that to a point whereby I'm confident enough to encourage others to develop their own leadership skills too.

"I've learned that empowering people is the greatest gift a leader can give, and ARLP gave us the skills needed to allow us to help others to blossom."

In his roles with the VFF and NFF, David is now particularly focused on getting young farmers involved in representation to ensure the next generation of leaders are supported to lead, and the organisations continue to provide a good value proposition to members.

"Listening to and valuing the perspectives and input of others is important and I'm pleased to have those skills to help me both further the interests of the people in my community but also the industry I represent," David said.















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## Ashley Fraser

Rutherglen, Victoria. Farmer and seed processor

ARLP Course 21: 2014/2015

Ashley Fraser is a grain farmer and seed processor from Rutherglen in north-east Victoria, and is now managing director of Baker's Seed, the family company that he has worked with for the last 22 years. He is also involved in the family farm business. He has held numerous positions in the seed industry, including his current role as Australian Seed Authority Director. In 2013, he became a Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) Grains Councillor, and in 2019 he was elected as the VFF Grains President.

It's rare that skills acquired during a leadership program make the difference between life and death, but as an active Country Fire Association member during the Victoria bushfires of 2019-20, Ashley Fraser said his ability to communicate clearly at the height of the crisis – thanks to his ARLP experience – was priceless.

"Communication is essential within the organisation and at a local brigade level, and this was reinforced by the isolation during the fire, being in a life-threatening, catastrophic situation," Ashley said.

"The inability to communicate effectively has the potential to be disastrous so I'm very grateful to have had those core abilities when I was on the fire front."

Five years prior to the weeks and months battling fires, Ashley successfully applied for a GRDC supported place on the ARLP – a process that turned his understanding of leadership on its head and rebuilt it from the ground up.

"I learned how to lead from behind and came to realise that the greatest quality of a leader is the ability to allow others to develop and use their skills," he said.

"That takes empathy and really engaged listening and up until I was given the opportunity to learn these skills, these definitely weren't things that came naturally to me.

"I can be a forthright and dogmatic person who finds it hard to change direction but that is a recipe for failure."

Ashley credits the ARLP with improving his ability to allow for change based on input from others, and developing the skills needed to build trust within teams.

"We can get thrust into leadership positions at any point in our lives. For me, involvement with the Grains Council led to involvement with the VFF and the opportunities continued from there," he said.

"In these roles and others, I'm able to use my ARLP experience and acquired skills constantly, as well as in the management of the family's properties and seed processing business, and for the benefit of my community through the Country Fire Authority."







**CENTRE SHED**









## A collective worth to others

While the program takes participants on a very personal and individual process ... at its core the ARLP is built on the desire to ensure rural and regional influencers have the tools and capacity to inspire change and play a part in making impact for good in regional parts of Australia.

For GRDC sponsored graduates it's been an opportunity to step up as models of what good leadership looks like, to foster leadership in others.

For Ashley Fraser, the program has helped him become that type of leader who can foster the growth of others.

"While some leaders gain positions of power by virtue of their status in the community, they don't necessarily have the effectiveness required, and that's what the ARLP provides – the skills to be a leader who is able to bring out the best in people," he said.

It's something the ARLP has developed over time – with great success – to ensure effective leaders are able to be driven by compassion and awareness for the greater good.

Davide Jochinke said that style of program delivery with specific and measurable outcomes can – and is – transforming regional Australia.

"Leaders who listen to others, trust their teams and act to effect change where they feel it is necessary is a gift to any regional town," he said.

"It is little wonder that ARLP graduates are found in leadership roles in various levels of society from community-based groups to larger organisations and industry groups like GRDC, who now also have a connection to a national network of leadership equipped individuals. "



Graduates in this case study  
were supported by:



**GRDC**<sup>™</sup>

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