

Gisborne agriculture shone on the stage last weekend as 110 Nuffield scholars visited farming business in the province and heard how local farmers had succeeded in finding their point of difference.

The conference, organised by local Nuffield scholars, also provided the opportunity for recent scholars to report on their studies and answer challenges from the floor. I was one of those who had to deliver a 20 minute presentation and then defend my recommendations.

Although nervous about standing up in the Rukupo whareniui, I am absolutely committed to 'bridging relationships between farmers and non-farmers' and relished the chance to talk to about my ideas. What an opportunity, there was no way I could miss it.

In 2008 I spent my six months travelling Canada, the UK and Europe seeing how other farmer groups were tackling the 'perception' challenge and since returning home have worked hard to adapt their ideas into Federated Farmers Farm Day, the Federation's national leadership courses and our provincially based younger farmers' step up and get political programmes.

Before my presentation, I have to admit that I was worried that past scholars would think my ideas a bit soft; find your authentic voice, tell honest stories and give people an opportunity to have a go at farm work. Did I convince them, yes I think so. How do I know this? Several Nuffield scholars have since offered me their farms for the next Farm Day.

For Greg Pardoe, a Gisborne Nuffield scholar, his challenge was harder as not only was he defending his study topic; indigenous people and how they have adopted to modern farming practices, he carries a dual leadership responsibility and obligation to Nuffield and his iwi, Rongowhakaata.

Over the three day conference we visited the farms or heard from several innovative farmers including Hamish Williams at Turihaua Angus; Mike Parker from Broadlands Kiwi Organics ; trustees from Whangara Farms, which is a partnership of two large Maori incorporations; Murray McPhail from LeaderBrand and Kim Dodgshun from Young Nick's Head.

There is expectation that every Nuffield scholar will return from their overseas studies and take up leadership roles in the industry. How you do this is your choice, what I learnt at the Gisborne conference is that past scholars mentoring, fellowship and networks will support me to become bolder.

Nuffield scholarships will be calling for applications soon for their 2011 programme. It's a fantastic opportunity to take six months out of your business, choose a study topic and travel the world meeting and debating with others in agriculture. Give it a go, you won't regret it.

For more information about the New Zealand Nuffield Scholarships Trust go to www.nuffield.org.nz.