Worshipful Company of Farmers – Jubilee Award 21 & Over – Claudia Sheridan

I’m Claudia Sheridan, I live on the outskirts of the Charnwood Forest with my partner next door to his Arable Farm. I am 24 years old and a part of Charnwood Young Farmers in Leicestershire. I have been an active member of Charnwood for numerous years and have undertaken various roles including Rally Captain, Events/Fundraising Secretary and Chairman. I have a degree in Equine Studies but shortly after completing my studies moved into the Agricultural Sector, I began as an administrator before moving swiftly into the Forage and Arable team where I started to gain more of an interest and understanding of the inputs and outputs of growing successful crops, alongside enabling me to join in more with the talks around the kitchen table!

Late summer (2018) I had noticed a tweet on the National Federation of Young Farmers Clubs advising of applying for a training grant, after having a read through of the information I was eager to begin my application. Still being relatively young and inexperienced in my career I always want to make the most of opportunities that arise and gain knowledge from the more experienced persons. In particular I am interested in looking at Fertiliser and making recommendations to ensure we are advising of the correct and economic advice rather than only being able to quote on a price basis.

During December I was enjoying a day off on the run up to Christmas when I got the email from James Eckley to advise me I had been successful to be awarded with the training grant through the Worshipful Company of Farmers. I was absolutely delighted and felt Christmas had come early, I had been aspiring to build on my knowledge and undertake my FACTS (Fertiliser Advisor Certificate & Training Scheme) for some time now but due to lack of funds this had not been possible.

I eagerly started emailing around the FACTS courses beginning near me in the New Year to make sure I could complete my training in the allocated time. I managed to get one of the last spots on James Christian-Ilett course to be held at Dunholme Village Hall in Lincolnshire.

The training was split into 2 separate weeks, 3 consecutive days in January and 2 consecutive days in February with the exam the week after. I had a read through James’ notes on NVZ rules and a scan through RB209 Section 1 the night before I made my journey down. I set off for Dunholme in the dark, after a pit-stop for a McDonalds Breakfast I arrived at the hall. I nervously sat in the car park for a few minutes before telling myself to get a grip and go and meet my colleagues for the new few days and James the trainer.

There was nothing to worry about, everyone was really welcoming and friendly, whilst James made the training informative but also very easy to understand with no question too silly. Over the course of the programme we covered everything from Soils, Crop Nutrition, PH Scale, Liming, Organic Manures, Fertiliser Materials, Environmental Protection, Crop Requirements, RB209 Use, Applications, Storage, Handling and Transportation of Fertilisers.

Whilst some of the content I was familiar with, some also helped my understanding where I had heard it used before but could now see where it fits – in particular Cation Exchange Cycle and Nitrogen Cycle, whilst some was completely new to me. At this stage, although I was determined to pass the exam, I was equally just happy by the range of topics we had covered that had helped build my confidence and knowledge in general.

On the build up to exam day I think my two colleagues/friends and partner also couldn’t wait for it to be over as much as me after me frantically getting them to ask me questions and test me daily! We began with the multiple choice, as always there was a few that completely threw me but on the whole I was pretty confident with my answers. When we all had come out everyone was going through the questions they weren’t sure on with James and I was relieved when a I heard a few I had got correct that I had been back to re-visit before finishing the paper.

Next we had the Scenario Section where we had to make recommendations based on the information given, thankfully - even though I had struggled to wrap my head around it when first learning – I was most confident on this section after lots of practice including making sense of my partners past recommendations.

Finally we moved onto the VIVA, the oral part. I was dreading this part the most as I wasn’t sure what to expect other than people who had sat VIVA’s before discussing how awful they are which was not helping my nerves! Especially as I knew they could ask us anything on the syllabus so there was no room for error on any subject. After hearing candidates coming in and out all day and flicking through notes panicking it wasn’t the most relaxing atmosphere! When my name was finally called it was a mixture of relief and dread! After getting asked about making a recommendation for carrots, Liming recommendations and a few other questions I was relieved to be finished and on my way home.

We had a month to wait until we would find out are results, although there was nothing you could do now to change them I consistently kept whittling on about not being sure how I had done. Finally Saturday 9th March the postman delivered a brown envelope, with baited breathe I ripped it open and was pleasantly greeted with my FACTS certificate – I’d passed!

I was so happy to not only have completed the course, but to pass the exam I was thrilled, none of this would have been possible without the generous training bursary from the Worshipful Company of Farmers.

I am looking forward to be able to meet up with the members in London and give them my appreciation. I feel I have learnt loads and would strongly recommend anyone that is eager about progressing their career and personal development further themselves to apply for this award, not only am I extremely grateful to the Worshipful Company of Farmers, but also to the National Federation of Young Farmers that gives us access and opportunity to be able to be involved with schemes and training like I have taken.

