The Worshipful Company of Farmers – Jubilee Scholarship 2018/19

**Tomas Ernie Richards (Ernie), 26, Herefordshire**

**Introduction**

I firstly must thank the Worshipful Company of Farmers for awarding me £500 as part of their Jubilee scholarship fund, contributing towards the cost of training within my chosen agricultural career. Along with the help from the National Federation of Young Farmers (NFYFC), the award has given me the chance to undergo essential training to allow me to enhance my farming career along with ensuring I am safe in the workplace.

**Background and Current Employment**

I am a first-generation shepherd working on a Mid Wales upland farm, over looking the Black Mountains near Hay-on-Wye on the Herefordshire/Powys border. Along with my boss and his wife, I help manage a flock of 1000 registered Lleyn ewes. The flock produces purebred breeding females for fellow sheep producers, whilst the entire ram lambs are sold deadweight for the export market. The grassland farm runs a low-cost system ensuring the best return can be made by managing the flock in a sustainable and health aware manner.

I enjoy all aspects of farming and am willing to undertake any farming responsibilities. I enjoy looking after and rearing livestock, with particular interest in sheep production. I ensure my work is carried out the highest standard, having animal welfare as key priority. I love the circle of farming, and being a contributor in producing top quality British products.

**My Interests and Hobbies**

I am a keen young farmer, who is always happy to get involved and try new things. I regularly go to talks and meetings organised by industry organisations to get advice and to keep up to date with methods and regulations. I am an active member of the National Sheep Association (NSA), being a past Young Ambassador, I actively promote British sheep farming.

My main hobby is being part of Young Farmers. A member of Teme Valley YFC, in Herefordshire, I love everything YFC has to offer. Meeting likeminded people, YFC provides so many opportunities. Having a ‘can-do’ attitude and getting involved, it has encouraged me to help YFC thrive within Herefordshire. I am lucky enough to be the current Vice County Chairman, with hopes to be elected County Chairman in autumn 2019. My main aim is to give something back to members which have given me so much!

**Future Plans**

In the near future I would like to take on more responsibility of the flock I help manage, and progression to further management of the farm. Over the next few years I hope to have full responsibility of the flock, with my boss taking less management responsibility. To advertise the business and the flock I would like to show sheep from the commercial flock, to show off the stock we produce. As an addition, within 5 years I would like to have a small flock of my own. Being a first-generation farmer, in the longer term, I have ambitions to start my own farming business. With this in mind looking towards the future having the chance of gaining qualifications, skills are invaluable to my future career.

**Training**

With my award of £500, I chose to undertake a selection of qualifications and land-based training.

* Level 2 Award in Safe Use of Pesticides – Handheld Knapsack (PA6)
* Rodent Control on Farms (E Learning)
* Level 2 Award in Animals in Transit – Short Journeys
* Health and Safety on Farms (E Learning)
* Responsible Use of Antibiotics in Sheep (E Learning)
* Introduction to Agricultural Vehicles (E Learning)

All of the training undertaken was all of equal importance and have benefitted my employment on a livestock farm. The training undertaken has increased my employability. When I am lucky enough to be running a farm or my own business, having the sufficient training would be of great advantage and reassurance.

* Level 2 Award in Safe Use of Pesticides - Handheld Knapsack (PA6). Working on a grassland farm, grassland weeds are a farm cost and equally unsightly. Weeds cause problems, hindering livestock to utilize grassland efficiently. Having the correct training to operate a sprayer correctly has meant I am now able to undertake spraying of grassland weeds in a safe and correct manner, ensuring myself, others and the environment isn’t harmed.
* Rodent Control On farms (E Learning). This online course has given me the current knowledge I need to correctly control the number of vermin on the farm I am employed on. Being a livestock farm, vermin are a common sight, infecting feed, water and other sources which may harm livestock and humans. Under new regulations having this training to control vermin on farms is essential meaning I can now play a key role in managing the farm I work on. Having the training has given me the correct knowledge to apply poisons to avoid harm to any domestic animals or humans. Again, having adequate training, would mean if I was running a farm/ business I would have suitable cover and certification to comply with regulations.
* Level 2 Award in Animals in Transit – Short Journeys, was essential training for an employee working with livestock. Understanding the correct regulations in order to keep livestock safe and out of harm during transport is vital to ensure welfare standards are sufficient. Within my role as a shepherd, I am now able to transport animals correctly meaning my job responsibility has increased and improving the management of the farm business. Having the correct certification has increased my employability and eligibility to advance my career. If I was running a farm/own business, having the training means I am now able to trade/move animals to a further distance, which would benefit financially.
* Health and Safety on Farms (E Learning). This training has been extremely beneficial. It has made me appreciate the importance of health and safety on farms. Understanding the risks and problems it has made me as an employee a lot safer, benefitting my employer’s business. Agriculture is a dangerous occupation, so having the correct understanding and training has made me aware of possible dangers, to avoid the horrible outcomes. Working with livestock can be unpredictable but they often bring many different problems, and the training has made me more aware of zoonotic diseases which can also cause health issues. Having a better understanding of safe use of machinery will make me a better operator. Again, if was running my own farm business, having the health and safety training is essential if was employing someone.
* Responsible Use of Antibiotics in Sheep (E Learning). This online course has made me understand the importance of responsible use of antibiotics. Even though Sheep require less antibiotics than other livestock, understanding how to reduce or control the use of antibiotics has been extremely beneficial. Relating to the flock I help manage, having a high health status is very important. The training has prompted me to evaluate our health plan to ensure we are doing the correct health management.
* Introduction to Agricultural Vehicles (E Learning). After undertaking this online course, it has made me appreciate the importance of Health and Safety. The course was a reminder of good practice when operating agricultural machines. The course refreshed my knowledge and informed me of updated regulations. The course has been a good way to indicate to my employer that I am keeping up to date with regulations and understanding safe vehicle operations.

**Livery Buddy**

In addition to my generous award, I was also granted a Livery Buddy as a mentor within my chosen industry. I have been lucky enough to have Mr John Thorley OBE, as my livery buddy.

Having the chance to hear John’s ideas, experience, and knowledge is invaluable. Learning from an experienced person is a good chance to evaluate my ability and see what my strengths and weakness are, to therefore improve for the future.

John’s wealth of experience within the Sheep industry has been great to ask questions and get advice about my future career. Listening to his involvement in the sheep sector, I hope it wil give me the opportunity to network and meet like-minded people who can give me career guidance and encouragement.

**Summary and Thank You**

Initially, I must thank the ‘National Federation of Young Farmers Clubs’, for coordinating, and informing me of this fantastic opportunity and I encourage all young farmers to apply for such a generous award.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the ‘Worshipful Company of Farmers’- I have really appreciated your help and support. I hope in the future I can benefit from your awards and wealth of experiences.

Thank You,

Ernie



