**Challenge of Rural Leadership Course Jan 2012**

**Rural Leadership, Developing the Skills**

*Agriculture is a truly exciting, dynamic and hugely innovative sector faced with massive challenges; a global population growing to nine billion in the next 30 years, loss of arable land, food security and climate change, while in the UK, the population is forecast to rise to 70 million by 2026 and become less than 50% self-sufficient in staple food.*

The Country is on the brink of great change, and the representation of farming is fundamental to the future. In order to deliver successfully, then the industry requires strong leadership delivered by highly effective individuals.

The Worshipful Company of Farmers’ annual Challenge of Rural Leadership (CRL) course, organised and managed by Duchy College is designed to do just that – to be more precise, to provide high potential managers with the tools to help grow and thrive in continuously changing conditions.

The 2012 course was staged at Dartington Hall in January involved 18 members – an eclectic mix of ages, skills and professions from the rural sector and also nationalities literally from A to Z: Australia, England, Isle of Man, Poland, Scotland, Wales and Zimbabwe.

We arrived as strangers with bare bones information of our daily schedule. We left two weeks later having experienced a personal journey into areas that we would never have explored without the course’s direction. It equipped us with the skills to become effective leaders, and it provided us with a lasting legacy of influence and impact. Equally important, we acquired a network of friendships within the industry.

The Challenge of Rural Leadership course has four key objectives:

* To enable members to develop their own business by having a better understanding and awareness of the strategic issues likely to occur over the next five years.
* To help members to critically evaluate the alternative approaches to management and leadership among rural businesses.
* To increase their ability to motivate and communicate, not only with staff and colleagues, but also the outside world.
* To increase the influence of the agricultural community, both nationally and internationally.

Week one was focused on ‘looking out’; seeing the bigger picture, introducing new tools, techniques and concepts. We were presented with a case study - nearby Riverford, we analysed the available information and developed and presented an alternative business strategy.

There was little, if any, time for relaxing at the weekend - team building and leadership skills were honed with practical outdoor activities on Dartmoor.

The second week we progressed to personal skills and development. The course provided an opportunity to ‘look in’ at ourselves and our own respective professions; we explored psychometrics to analyse our leadership capabilities and we were challenged on how to make critical and wicked decisions.

The two weeks involved active course member to member participation and also engaging with our visiting speakers and course tutors, who together provided a huge and diverse range of information and resources. The speakers included an agronomist, business entrepreneurs, communications consultant, editors, geneticist, hospital management consultant, life peer and research fellow. A number of Liverymen came to the course as observers and the Master and Junior Warden Baroness Byford created a lasting impression as a very knowledgeable and creative double act.

CRL certainly provided the challenge; it took us out of our comfort zones and encouraged us to ‘get up on to the balcony’ to maintain perspective. Together with my fellow course members, I would highly recommend this course to other potential industry leaders. Liz manages a PR and communications business focused on agri-business and food sector development.

**Liz Snaith, March 2012**