

Young leader's award opens doors for Australian winner

Winner of the 2007 Alltech Australian Young Leaders in Agricultural Journalism Award, Paul Hooper, writes about his experiences in Japan where he attended the 2007 International Federation of Australian Journalists (IFAJ) conference as part of his award prize.



The Alltech Young Leaders award, I believe, is one of the most beneficial awards on offer for Australia's budding generation of rural journalists.

Geography, isolation and a declining workforce are the worst enemies of the rural media industry in Australia. It is for this reason many young people do not choose such a career path.

The Alltech award is absolutely crucial to the survival of the industry and to show young rural journalists that they can actually 'get out there' and experience the world and not go unappreciated in some small office in regional Australia.

Unfortunately, or fortunately, our industry relies heavily on sponsorship. Not just for international

congresses, but for the daily operations of our media associations, press clubs, events and regional awards.

Unpredictable seasonal conditions, volatile agricultural commodity prices and plenty of other attractive industries make it very difficult for the rural media industry to source staff and viable long-term sponsorship and relationships. When we do get a company such as Alltech giving generous sponsorship to our industry we should embrace it.

Being the president of the Rural Media Association of Western Australia and an advocate of encouraging younger journalists to the industry, I felt it was my duty to set an example and apply for the Alltech Young Leaders award. I had hoped by leading by example that my colleagues would also apply and I never expected to win.

The opportunity to explore another nation's agricultural industry is just too good for any journalist to resist. Particularly Japan, a country that has strong trade ties with Australia.

Above all, I wished to meet other young journalists from around the world to see if they faced the same problems as we do in Australia. And yes, we are not alone.

Once in Japan I found the various agricultural tours to be invaluable. Although there were really no 'ground-breaking' stories as such, I did find that Japanese perceptions of Australian agricultural commodities provided a very sound base for in-depth analysis of any future trade with Australia.

I also found the Japanese population's pride in their domestically produced produce extremely positive. It may not be good news for potential trade partners in Australia, but it does show what pride in one's farming sector and greater population can do for an industry. It is perhaps a point many Australians should consider when it comes to everyday shopping.

The greatest benefit on a personal level was to network with people from every corner of the world. Having a meal, social drinks or even just chatting on a bus with international colleagues has opened more doors for me than I could ever have hoped for.

It is these experiences that keep the flame burning when you are sitting in an isolated office or writing a mundane story thinking 'what the hell am I doing here.'

In short, the IFAJ congress restored my faith in an industry where talent and hard work often goes unrecognised.

The most important thing is to encourage more young people to be involved in the IFAJ through the direct involvement with organisations such as Alltech. This will ensure the future of such an important federation.

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