

Co-ops leading through innovation

Market, member focus, and good governance delivering success and resilience



Innovation was the common theme when some of Scotland's best co-op businesses shared their strategies and latest developments at SAOS' conference on 2nd February. Delegates heard examples from across the breadth of business activities: industry and market positioning, research and development, member service standards, and governance arrangements. In every case, continuous evaluation, learning and evolution were drivers of business performance and change.

The innovation message was reinforced by experienced academics and developers of co-operation from the University of Western Australia and SAOS. Professor Tim Mazzarol reported on research he is co-ordinating across several countries and described the findings as providing a guide to building strong, successful and resilient co-ops. The research findings will be published in a book later this year. Jim Booth and Bob Yuill reported SAOS' findings after conducting several member surveys for co-ops, and on new thinking for capitalising co-ops in future.

In his introduction to the conference, James Graham, SAOS Chief Executive, said: "Across our 75 co-ops, with tens of thousands of farmer members, and £2.3 billion of transactions, the economic role of agricultural co-ops is undeniable. Yet their contribution is greater than those figures suggest. In some sectors, we might not still be producing at all, were it not for the role that co-ops have created in the market and in helping sustain Scotland's food processing companies. Co-ops deliver multiple bottom lines that include social outcomes such as sustaining family farms, creating rural employment and skills development, investing in areas in which it would be otherwise unlikely, and by supporting other local businesses."

We have been invited by the University of Western Australia (UWA) to participate in a conference on 8th/9th November in Perth, and in a study tour to visit agricultural co-op businesses that would be arranged in conjunction with CBH Group Ltd, an Australian national grain handling and marketing co-op. Agriculture in Western Australia is booming thanks in part to strong demand from China and the responsiveness of farmers and their co-ops to new opportunities.

If you might be interested in joining us on this learning visit (which will require about one week), please note your interest with Jennifer Grant at SAOS, and we will keep you informed as proposals develop.



Flanked by SAOS Vice Chairman, Andy Peddie, and Chief Executive, James Graham, is Stewart Stevenson, Minister for Environment & Climate Change, our after dinner speaker.



Katy Rainy Brown congratulates the winner of this year's Ed Rainy Brown Award, Ian Duncan Millar.

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SAOS CONFERENCE REPORT - WHAT DID WE LEARN?



Sandy Howie - Scottish Pig Producers, on strategy

- “Service and delivery come first, to our members, to our processors and to retailers.” Sandy described how SPP services the needs and expectations of each of the other partners in their supply chain, and the systems and standards in place to ensure these are always met. “Always deliver - never over-promise.”
- “Nothing in farming or in our market stays the same, so we constantly seek improvements and new initiatives.” In recent years, SPP has introduced an early payment scheme, collaborated with customers in introducing new products, adopted health schemes and welfare standards, and even extended its reach to Northern Ireland where it provides a marketing service to pig farmers there.
- “Involvement in all aspects of the industry through representation has made SPP a first port of call.” SPP actively participates in Quality Meat Scotland, NFU Scotland, SAOS, welfare schemes, monitor farms and has regular contact with the Scottish Government. “We accept responsibility to help our industry.”

Bruce Ferguson - Aberdeen Grain, on member service

- “The Member Care Charter is a critical part of achieving Aberdeen Grain and Angus Cereals’ strategic objectives.” The groups’ core strategies are to reduce waste and increase efficiency in the supply chain, improve service levels to growers, create marketing leverage and added value for members, deliver “on time, in quality”.
- “Our ten point Member Care Charter responds directly to what members told us really matters to them.” The charter was developed following research amongst members and is concerned with aspects of communications, harvest uplift times and reliability, clarity of paperwork, and future planning. “Perceptions are created by every communication – so it must always be professional and competent.”
- “We are developing a culture of service level improvement that involves staff, directors, and members.” Post harvest surveys provide immediate feedback which is analysed by management and the Board, followed by planning for improvement.



Alistair Ewan - East of Scotland Growers on innovation

- “In our 25 year history, we have never stopped innovating.” Alistair described the fast pace of change in unsupported vegetable production. Through ESG, its 20 members now supply 30% of UK multiple retailers’ fresh broccoli from 4,300 acres of production. “I have been described as a broccoli geek.”
- “We participated in the development of the variety Beneforte because it has high anti-oxidant, health boosting qualities and good market prospects.” Beneforte, grown by ESG, was launched in December. A health claim is expected to be approved soon. ESG will be one of the principal UK growers, and will command a premium price.
- “Our research and innovation programme attracts EU grant as a PO.” ESG is a certified Producer Organisation in accordance with the Fruit and Vegetable Regime and as such is eligible for grants towards its approved R&D programme. “We have developed and adopted cutting edge technology in agronomy and processes in the supply chain in pursuit of long term sustainability.”

Tom Campbell - First Milk, on governance

- “To get the right people to direct our £500 million business, we have changed from selecting from a small pool, to selecting the best people, and from recruiting the inexperienced, to selecting those with a proven track record.” Tom described a change in approach to constructing the Board that ensures it is capable of directing First Milk in the best interests of members.
- “We’re clear as a Board that our strategies must drive cash to our shareholder members.” To achieve this, the Board has adopted core strategy drivers of ‘grow our brands’, ‘diversify our product base’, ‘lower costs to serve’, and ‘seek value in partnership’.
- “We’re creating our futures, as dairy farmers. We are for long-term sustainability”. Tom described progress achieved in adding value in First Milk’s cheese businesses through branding and product development, and the long-term prospects of partnerships established with Fonterra, Eilers and Wheeler, Volac and Grocontinental. He also referred to the importance of First Milk investment in Campbeltown, supported by the Scottish Government.



SAOS CONFERENCE REPORT - WHAT THE EXPERTS SAID



Professor Tim Mazzarol, University of Western Australia

To build a strong successful sustainable co-op, the business must be active at three levels:

1. Member Level: A farmer wears different 'hats' at different times in membership of a co-op, as a 'patron' (customer) who requires its services on the farm; as an 'investor' with risk capital committed; as an 'owner' with ownership rights and responsibilities; and as a 'community member' with an interest in the co-op's ability to invest and employ locally and support local services. Successful co-ops acknowledge the different 'hats' and address them through strategies that build member identity, commitment and loyalty. Communications are critically important.

2. Enterprise Level: The Board and management establish the purpose of the co-op (member value proposition, target member characteristics); the profit formula (the revenue model, the cost benefit structure, margin model, resource velocity); key processes (customer relationships, distribution, HR, ops management, rules, policies, metrics); and key resources (physical facilities, core competencies, alliances, team structures). Planning and implementation at this level distinguish the enterprise success as a co-op business whose purpose is delivering value to members in the form they require.

3. Systems Level: Key factors at this level to which a co-op must respond include **government regulation** (CAP, corporate law, economic policy and tax, social policy); **industry structure** (competitiveness, power concentrations, new entrants, threat of substitutes); **environmental impact** (access to land and water, climate events and climate change, pests and disease); and **social capital** (farmers must be willing and able to mobilise into a co-op and have resources to apply).

Tim illustrated his talk with references to several successful Australian examples: CBH Group Ltd (cereals), Capricorn Society Ltd (wool), Murray Goulburn Dairy Co-op, and Mount Barker Co-op Ltd (orchard fruit). Tim's conclusions:

- A co-op is a unique type of business enterprise
- Strong, resilient, successful co-ops are built on a clear well-defined purpose supported by a sound business model
- A co-op must attend equally to its dual roles of generating economic and social capital.
- A co-op is sustained by building member loyalty, identity and commitment via offering and delivering a member value proposition.

Jim Booth - SAOS, on listening to members

Jim Booth reported from his experiences of assisting ten co-ops to carry out full membership surveys over a three year period. Some co-ops were initially reluctant to carry out a survey, but then subsequently found the results invaluable in both confirming the success of the co-op and in identifying strategic needs for business planning. The key results were:

- Response rates exceeded 50% in most cases; high for postal surveys. The surveys followed a standard format but were adapted for relevance to each co-op. A mix of questions covered satisfaction with services and performance, suggestions for new services, communications and responsiveness, value of membership and perceptions of the co-op.
- Assessed against a consistently applied 'loyalty index', all of the co-ops except one scored well in excess of 50%. Members provided very positive feedback and supported their co-op.
- Each survey clearly identified opportunities to develop services or communications to further improve member satisfaction, understanding and participation.

Jim concluded that every co-op should regularly conduct a member survey. They are a component of good governance and business development, and help to build commitment and loyalty. They also help directors and members to appreciate both the economic and community value of their co-op.



Bob Yuill - SAOS, on capital in co-ops

Bob Yuill clarified some misunderstandings about capital in co-ops and made some suggestions for the future. His key messages:

- "It is easier to raise capital for an agricultural co-op than it is for any other small to medium sized investor-owned business." Whereas members are generally committed to use the services of their co-op and to accept the responsibilities of membership, including contributing to its capital requirements, investors in "share owned" businesses often have no interest beyond speculating on dividend returns and capital growth.
- "The level of capital risk in a co-op is generally lower than in an investor company." Whereas an investor is essentially a speculator motivated to withdraw capital (sell shares) when risk is perceived to be too high (business prospects are poor), a co-op member is not motivated to withdraw capital, because his farm business is in some part dependent on the co-op. The more effective and successful the co-op at addressing members' needs, the lower the commercial (and capital) risk.
- "We need to open up new thinking to allow folks and organisations who wish to do so to be able to invest in their local co-ops via transferable shares." The change in co-op law removing any limit on individual member holdings of transferable shares creates new opportunities, but innovative thinking is required. We need to consider how to allow people to be able to invest in their local co-ops. Many, including SAOS, have cash deposits but don't have a mechanism to allow easy investment in our co-ops. This need not imply any compromise of co-op purpose and principles.

If you would like more information on conducting a survey, or if you would like to discuss new capitalisation possibilities, please contact jim.booth@saos.coop or bob.yuill@saos.coop respectively.

NEWS

Scotland's Food Policy a Model for the World

Richard Lochhead, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment lauded progress against Scotland's food and drink policy objectives and told delegates at Scotland's National Food and Drink Conference on 7th March that countries from across the world were now visiting Scotland to learn how economic, education, health and environment policy aspirations could be accommodated in a cohesive policy.

The Cabinet Secretary said that "the reputation of Scotland's food and drink is rocketing across the world", and that there was outstanding potential to increase exports. A recent trade mission to Dubai had generated massive interest in luxury and premium products with Scottish provenance. The 2014 Commonwealth Games and Ryder Cup would attract tourists from across the globe, all of whom would experience Scotland's food and drink.

Mr Lochhead pointed out growth was evident at local, national and international levels. "There has been 25% growth in sales since 2007, and the industry looks set to beat its £12.5 billion target five years early, outperforming other sectors. Exports broke through £1 billion for the first time. Sales to the rest of the UK increased by 30%, and 50 new farmers' markets have started." Mr Lochhead added that the local food movement was "sweeping the country" due to a range of individual motivations. Scottish Government aimed to set out an ambitious new vision for local food later in the year.

The effects of recession in the UK, and issues of health, diet, obesity and lifestyle in Scotland, remained as priority challenges. The Cabinet Secretary pledged £2 million of funding over three years to ensure that every school child understands more about the food they eat and how it impacts on their health and the environment.

Co-op Sector Launches Schools Teaching programmes

Co-operative Education Trust Scotland, supported by The Co-operative Group, SAOS and Scotmid, has launched 'the co-operative farm to food cycle', an on-line teaching resource showing how food is produced, sold and re-cycled, and the pivotal role that co-ops play at all stages of the cycle.

Hugh Donnelly, CETS Chief Executive, said: "The resource responds to the requirements of the Curriculum for Excellence and brings real world examples of the farm to food cycle illustrated with farmers' co-ops, farmers' markets, the Co-op and Scotmid. It's an interactive teaching resource supported by a teachers' handbook."

The resource was designed in close consultation with teachers over a period of months to ensure the material accords with teaching requirements and that it will appeal to pupils. The result has been a massive response from schools across Scotland. Within just three weeks of launch, 250 schools had downloaded the materials for use.

Co-operative Education Trust Scotland is also launching an SQA Certificate in Co-operative Studies. This will be available at SCQF Levels 4,5 and 6. Pupils will gain a grounding in co-operative values and principles as a core element and will then have options around young co-operative enterprise or investigating the global co-operative economy.

James Graham, who is a director of CETS said: "These are tremendously significant developments that will prove over time to be of enormous value to all of us involved in co-operative businesses. I applaud the CETS team for developing excellent links with education professionals and stimulating such high levels of interest in co-operatives." **For more information go to www.cets.coop**



Grant boost for D&G food co-op

Dumfries and Galloway Food Co-operative has been awarded a Food Processing, Marketing and Co-operation grant of almost £1.3 million towards the cost of an abattoir at Craignair, near Dalbeattie.

Currently, the vast majority of livestock produced in Dumfries and Galloway is slaughtered outwith the region – either in other Scottish plants or further afield.

Rural Affairs Secretary Richard Lochhead said: "By providing a slaughter and meat processing facility, the new Dalbeattie abattoir will provide Dumfries and Galloway farmers and butchers with a local option instead of having to ship their livestock out of the area." James Graham, Chief Executive of SAOS added: "The announcement

of support for Dumfries & Galloway Food Co-op provides further tangible evidence in this UN International Year of Co-operatives of the Scottish Government's support for locally owned, self-help enterprise.

James added: "The co-op was initiated in response to a clear local need and pursued with great vigour and persistence by its founder members who are to be congratulated on securing this grant. The new abattoir will be an essential component in the future of the Dumfries and Galloway farming and food economy, opening new opportunities for value-adding and branding."

ESG's Super Broccoli hits the shelves

East of Scotland Growers will be a main supplier of a new broccoli 'super food' that hit the supermarket shelves for the first time in December and will become widely available later this year. The Fife based growers' co-op has worked with scientists in crop trials over a period of years and its members will benefit from what is expected to be high demand and a premium price.

Alistair Ewan, ESG's Chief Executive said: "Beneforte was created by cross pollinating a conventional variety with a native Sicilian variety, so we had to thoroughly test its nutritional and agronomic requirements and the consistency of the high levels of glucoraphanin which provides the super food qualities."

'Super foods' are generally thought of as naturally rich in anti-oxidants and help to fight cancer and heart disease. Blueberries, tea, and dark chocolate are well known examples, and now broccoli can be added to this list. Beneforte contains three times more glucoraphanin than conventional broccoli. Verification of Beneforte's health claims are pending.



NEWS

QMS and C2 Project host butchery event



A butchery masterclass in Troon in February offered 'the whole hog', giving insight into the quality and versatility of Specially Selected Pork.

Organised by the Scotch Beef Club, with assistance from the C2 Project, the day saw chefs, butchers and farmers discussing the steps that go into producing and presenting top quality Specially Selected Pork, and the opportunities and variety it can offer on restaurant menus.

SAOS' Vice Chairman Andrew Peddie opened the masterclass with the farmer's perspective, highlighting the technology, welfare and quality assurance involved in modern day pig farming in Scotland.

The event looked at the whole supply chain, with Barry Robertson of Robertson's Fine Foods of Ardrossan gave an insight into the processing end of the chain and the importance of specification and carcass quality to ensuring customers get the correct product for their needs.

Margaret Stewart, Marketing Manager at QMS, said: "Pork sales have increased considerably over the past months, but our research shows that it is still lagging behind beef and lamb – particularly within the food service sector. The presentations showed that every part of the pig is raised to the same high standards and that it all can be used to create exciting and innovative dishes."

Research Shows Vulnerability of Island Abattoirs

The future of abattoirs in the western Highlands and Islands is under severe threat as a result of low throughput and high regulatory costs, according to a study completed by Fergus Younger of Argyll Agricultural Forum/SAOS, Mike Caldwell of MCA Regeneration and Mike Story of Argyll and the Isles Tourism Forum. The study reviewed ten island facilities (two of which had already closed) across an area stretching from Arran to Shetland, and carried in-depth research of the Mull and Islay abattoirs, both of which have encountered considerable difficulty in identifying a viable and durable business model.

In a sobering assessment of the situation, Fergus Younger observes: "Small abattoirs are not profit-generating businesses, and it may be a mistake to think of them in that light. They don't enjoy scale benefits to spread costs, with the result that charges per head are prohibitively high." The study identified that waste disposal costs and regulatory costs relating to meat inspection, the FSA and other 'red tape' were disproportionately high, and recommended special support for these. However, all other costs were also high including overheads such as power and labour.

According to Fergus: "These abattoirs are really a component of rural infrastructure that can be beneficial by making it possible to produce island provenance premium-branded meat that helps sustain farmers and is important to the tourism industry, as well as achieving carbon savings by avoiding transport to distant mainland abattoirs."

The Argyll Agricultural Forum and partners are in talks with several agencies about the findings of the study and action which could be taken.

Claim Tax Relief for Research and Innovation

If your co-op is spending on any form of research and innovation, you should check out the terms of the Inland Revenue's 'R & D Relief for Corporation Tax'. Under this scheme, your corporation tax bill may reduce or be eligible for a tax credit, which may be in the form of a lump sum from HMRC.

Many revenue costs incurred in research and innovation are eligible for relief including employee costs, materials, utilities, software and sub-contracted expenditure. You must have incurred at least £10,000 of research and innovation costs in an accounting year to qualify, although this limit will be removed from 1 April 2012. There are separate schemes for SMEs and large businesses. Find out more on the HMRC website at: www.hmrc.gov.uk/ct/forms-rates/claims/randd.htm#5.

CO-OP FACTFILE - HBS RING LTD

Established: 1989

Chairman: Steve Mackenzie

Managing Director: Alan McLean

How many members: 1100

HBS Ring Ltd is a co-operative of farmers, estates, contractors, small businesses and individual members who have the common aim of working together to save money and add value. Their throughput in 2010 was £6.6 million.

The Ring's core business remains sourcing skilled labour and machinery from potential 'supplier' members, to fulfil the requirements for machinery and labour services from 'demander' members. This low cost facilitation and administration service enables members throughout the Highlands of Scotland to make best use of their combined resources.

In the years since the Ring was established, activities have expanded and diversified, and the Ring can supply just about anything that a member would require – and at very competitive prices. Fuels, fuel tanks, seeds, fertilisers, lime, forage, crop packaging and much more are all available through HBS.

The Ring is also working to provide specialist services to assist members to embark on renewable energy developments, gaining from a collective approach.

What does co-operation mean to HBS Ring? "Working and pulling together with the common aims of saving cost, adding value and providing an efficient service."

Tel: 01463 811603 Email: hbs@hbsring.co.uk www.hbsring.co.uk



The Fraser family, Tore Mains, Black Isle, members of HBS

NEWS

Ed Rainy Brown Award for Ian Duncan Millar

Ian Duncan Millar was the recipient of this year's Ed Rainy Brown Award. He was presented with the award by Katy Rainy Brown at the post-conference dinner in February.

Ian farms near Aberfeldy, and is also involved with an impressive list of companies and organisations. He is currently Scottish Director of the National Fallen Stock Company; a Director of Moredun Research Institute; Chairman of Highland Glen Lamb marketing group and a past chair of the Scottish Agricultural Arbiters and Valuers Association. More recently, he chaired a strategy group developing the role that SAC's farm at Kirkton, Criannarich could play in improving hill farming in Scotland. In the past, Ian was a driving force behind the introduction of assurance schemes to the

Scottish livestock sector. In January 2010 he received an MBE in the Queen's honours.

Alan Bowie, Vice President of NFUS, who announced the winner, said: "Ian has the ability to positively engage with both his fellow farmers and the wider industry, take a wide range of views on board and deliver the common-sense solutions and recommendations."

SAOS Vice Chairman, Andrew Peddie added: "Ian Duncan Miller has demonstrated time and again that he is one of Scotland's great co-operators and he sets an example to us all. He instinctively looks to collaborate to find solutions and make the best of opportunities, but always with commercial farming realities clearly in focus. Ian is undoubtedly a very worthy recipient of the award."

Change at the top for ANM

Pat Machray replaced Alan Craig as Chief Executive of the ANM Group in February. Mr Craig's sudden departure followed announcements of financial concerns within ANM's three meat business – the plants collectively lost £1.342m in 2009, and Mr Craig warned ANM's 7500 members to expect further losses in the meat division. ANM Group Chairman, John McIntosh, said: "We recognise the business, and indeed the industry, is operating in an extremely challenging environment and have appointed Mr Machray in this role to guide us through this demanding period."

Mr Machray has a wealth of experience at board level, coupled with in-depth commercial and industry knowledge. Mr McIntosh added: "ANM Group is delighted Pat has accepted this role, frankly he is the ideal candidate. The board realises the group has distinct challenges in certain areas of its business and Pat is particularly well qualified to navigate the organisation through demanding times."

Food from Argyll to Germany



Established in 1926, International Green Week is a unique exhibition for food, agricultural, and horticultural industries from all over the world. This year's IGW, which took place in Berlin in January, saw the Food from Argyll group join other producers to test-market food and luxury items and promote their brand image.

IGW also features commercial and non-commercial agricultural, forestry, and landscaping exhibits. Changing annual themes have included renewable resources and scientific livestock breeding and production. The group were part of a food and drink tasting on the European commission stand (with whisky, salmon and haggis) and Colin Imrie of the Scottish Government gave a presentation on Food from Argyll project and the role of leader funding in supporting and kick-starting regional initiatives. This highlighted the role of collaboration and co-operation, not only regionally but now trans-nationally through the Taste of Rural Europe Project.

Pictured on the stand in Berlin are - Colin Imrie, Scottish Government; Virginia Sumsion, Argyll Food Producers; Anna Augustyn, European Network For Rural Development, and Fergus Younger, Argyll Agricultural Forum/SAOS

Change of plans at Campbeltown

Following extensive discussions between First Milk and the Scottish Government, a brand new cheese-making facility will be installed at First Milk's existing site in Campbeltown on the Mull of Kintyre, securing the future of 38 dairy farms and 100 jobs on the peninsula.

The new factory will allow for increased production and provide processing efficiencies which cannot be achieved at the current plant. Over the past two years, First Milk had progressed plans to sell its existing Campbeltown site to Tesco and, backed by grant funding from the Scottish Government, relocate to a new location in the town. However, Tesco has now indicated that it no longer wishes to purchase the site in order to build a larger store in the town, and as a result, the creamery will remain at its current location. It will now be funded by up to £2 million from the Scottish Government and funds from First Milk.

First Milk's Chief Executive, Kate Allum, commented: "Throughout this process we have remained absolutely committed to our farmers on Kintyre, to the creamery and to the development of our world-famous Mull of Kintyre brand. With that in mind, we will invest in a brand new cheese-making facility at our existing site, aided by grant support from the Scottish Government."

"We have met with farmers and employees in Campbeltown to inform them of developments, and agreed to work as one team to develop a long term sustainable future for the dairy industry on Kintyre."

Kate finished by putting on record thanks to Richard Lochhead and the Scottish Government, adding: "We greatly value their support over the last few years and their continuing commitment to this project."

Highly profitable year for Openfield

The Openfield Group has reported a highly profitable year for 2011 with a £4m profit.

The grain trading and farm inputs business reported a turnover of £636m to June 2011, which was up 30%. Net cash at year's end was £0.9m, compared with net debt of £5.9m last year, and shareholders' funds were up 8.7% to £22.4m.

Group MD, Tim Davies, said: "The results demonstrate the continuing progress made by the group in creating a business with strength and stability for the benefit of our farmer members and supply chain members."

Continuing our focus reminding readers of some of the benefits and services available through Scotland Food & Drink, in this issue we're looking at the Access to Markets Service.

Access To Markets is focused on identifying and delivering commercial opportunities with retail and foodservice companies within the UK. It also helps food and drink companies build their capabilities to enable them to capitalise on opportunities available and develop sustainable business relationships.

The service offers a broad range of activities designed to provide relevant information, training and events, and is available to any Scottish food and drink business with an aspiration to grow their sales in the UK.

- **Access To Markets services include: Meet the Buyer, Buyer Briefings, Supplier Development & New Supplier Programmes, Skills Workshops, Learning Journeys and UK Trade and Consumer Exhibitions.**
- **Access to Markets has a dedicated team who work with multiple grocers; regional, specialist and independent retailers; and foodservice operators, including end-user groups, contract caterers, wholesalers and distributors.**
- **The team also work closely with INSIGHTS to help companies deliver consumer focused rationale to help them capitalise on market opportunities.**
- **Companies participating in activity will gain a better understanding of UK market opportunities and be better equipped to capitalise on these, as well as develop their skills to help them build sustainable trading relationships and prepare for customer negotiations.**

One of the success stories of Access To Markets has been the **Meet The Buyer** events. Over 200 companies have been introduced to regional and national retailer and foodservice buyers; many have secured listings for their products, both in Scotland and south of the border.

Strong relationships with trading organisations enable the team to offer a range of opportunities to introduce Scottish companies to key buyers. Previous events include those with major supermarket groups such as Tesco, Waitrose, Sainsbury's, Asda and Morrisons; convenience retailers David Sands and Haldanes; and specialist retailers Harrods, Peckhams and Dobbies. In the foodservice sector, we have helped producers forge relationships with a number of key operators including 3663, Forteith Foodservice, Lomond Fine Foods and Dunns Food & Drinks Baxter Storey and JD Wetherspoon.

There are also opportunities to attend **Buyer Briefings**, where companies are able to hear first-hand insights from buyers about their organisation and what becoming a supplier would entail. A Buyer Briefing Open Day event was recently delivered in partnership with premium discount retailer ALDI, who opened the doors of their Bathgate depot to producers from across Scotland. Food & Drink producers heard an insightful and informative briefing from the head of Scottish buying and met senior members of the HQ team, attended one-to-one meetings with category buyers and were treated to a guided tour of ALDI's distribution depot.

Access to Markets is delivered in partnership with Highlands & Highlands Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise.

For more information, contact Stephanie Pritchard on 0131 335 0940 or Stephanie.pritchard@scotlandfoodanddrink.org

SF&D Excellence Awards dinner

Entries to the Scotland Food & Drink Excellence Awards are now closed and we eagerly await the results which will be announced in May.

The awards, run jointly by Scotland Food & Drink and the Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland have been recognising and rewarding the very best in Scottish food and drink for many years and continue to be considered a true badge of excellence.

Within the awards, there are a total of 17 categories aimed at rewarding companies and their products, in areas such as skills development and new product innovation and everything in between. The C2 Project is once again sponsor of the Success Through Working in Partnership award.

If you would like to book tickets for the awards ceremony and dinner at the Dunblane Hydro Hotel on Thursday 24th May 2012, please contact Linda Chirnside on 0131 335 0940 or linda.chirnside@scotlandfoodanddrink.org Tickets are charged at £100 per ticket for Scotland Food & Drink or RHASS members (companies short-listed in the Awards also pay £100 per ticket) and £125 per ticket for all others.



Scotland Food & Drink
**Excellence
Awards 2012**

PROFILE - JIM BOOTH

Continuing our series of profiles on SAOS staff and directors, this month we focus on SAOS project manager, Jim Booth who has been with the organisation since 2006.



Tell us a bit about your role.

The one thing you can guarantee about SAOS is that your role is constantly changing and evolving. Increasingly, I am delivering a wide range of governance services, principally to members (board health checks, board strategy workshops, members surveys, director development, managers' forum, etc). I also lead a number of monitor farm projects and business benchmarking groups which is really all about working with groups of farmers. I guess my role is primarily about trying to influence people, developing their confidence and capability.

Coming from a consultancy background, it took me a while to adjust to the different skills set required for development. Effective development is more challenging than simply delivering consultancy. You need to think more about the industry, particularly at a strategic level, identifying where the blockages are and, more importantly, how to make things better. Problem solving and finding solutions is another integral part of the job. SAOS prides itself on making things happen.

What are the biggest changes you've seen in your time with SAOS?

We now do more work with our members than previously which is great. There is a real momentum behind our governance services work. The range and complexity of our work has also increased, particularly on the supply chain and food side which is a great credit to Alan Stevenson and his team. The organisation has also grown a lot over the last few years and we're now experiencing some growing pains so the need for good management is even greater.

What is the most enjoyable part of your job?

That is easy, the most enjoyable part of the job is working with our member co-ops. It is really rewarding to work closely with our various managers and boards, supporting them to develop their businesses and service levels for the benefit of members. We have some world class co-ops in Scotland so it is a privilege to help them in any small way we can. Another aspect of the job which is important to me is that you never stop learning.

What has been your biggest work-related challenge ?

A constant challenge is keeping up-to-date with the admin, timesheets, expenses etc! Like most folk, I prefer active delivery rather than the paperwork.

Facilitating the Pig Monitor Farm project really took me out of my comfort zone as the pig industry is so specialised and everyone is at such a high level, you really need to know your stuff. They don't suffer fools either, however, I learned a lot which can be usefully applied to other sectors of the industry.

Saying 'no' is always a challenge. We're getting busier every year with little slack in the system, so finding the time to think, dream and sharpen the saw is not easy.

If you could change one thing about the agriculture industry, what would it be?

Like all small business owners farmers are fiercely independent and self-reliant. This can cause a lot of inefficiency, adds cost and creates more hassle for folk. It would be great if farmers were more open to the benefits of working more collaboratively with each other. Not only is it a route to manage risk and strip out cost but it is the only way to exert some influence in the market place.

What would you be doing if you didn't work for SAOS?

Hopefully we don't have to find out in the too near future! I guess I would either be managing a business or self-employed doing consultancy work.

How do you like to spend your free time?

I've always spent my spare time playing sport especially football and cross-country running. In fact I just had to hang up my boots last summer so still have withdrawal symptoms after 40 years of playing every week. Elise says I'm even more grumpy nowadays! We have a big garden and a clump of trees at the side of the house so I enjoy being in the woods with my power saw. I'm not sure health & safety would approve of some of my stunts but hey ho. My other passion is music - I've a wide range of taste in music. There are also loads of things I want to do but never seem to have the time but taking up golf is next on the list.

What's your ideal holiday?

Well that's easy, sharing a log cabin with Rihanna in the Rockies!