

CAFA Chair's message for 2013

We know that from comments and enquiries made to Liz Robertson (CAFA Executive Director) that there are agriculture clients who are actively looking for industry professionals who are experts in their field, but more specifically, sport the CAFA designate. They are aware that CAFA members keep themselves updated with continuous education and by frequent networking with other professionals. So that provides those clients with the confidence that they are seeking, when hiring an advisor.

But, as industry professionals, do we all use our designation to openly advertise our skills and make our credentials apparent? Do we go out of our way to look for and subsequently help these specific clients?

With all the modern communication aids, it should be far easier to connect with clients seeking professional services. Now, of course, word of mouth is still by far the best recommendation, but have you considered how you can make your company and the services it offers, one step ahead of the rest? A friendly helpful disposition is paramount. Timely and accurate completion of the task is essential, as well as going the extra mile in order that both your current and future clients will benefit by and appreciate your services.

A client will always be concerned in getting value for money. Even if the advisor has provided a first class service, equating that to the cost of the service will be readily assessed by most clients no matter how good a name the advisor or their company possesses.

A trend that is developing, especially with larger scale production units, is for the producer to form an advisory team of agricultural professionals in order to continue to propel the business toward greater profitability. Revenues in all the major sectors of agriculture are basically static and in some cases, volatile. Regular meetings of the appointed management team can help to formulate cost-saving and marketing strategies. As well as taking on crop or livestock production specialists, the producer is looking for accounting, lending, business management, financial investment and maybe other advice. Having a specialist facilitator to get the most out of these sessions is also a huge benefit. Knowing when to set up term loans and save on

interest payments is as important as knowing whether to sell or hang on to the crop. Succession planning has been looked upon as being the way to offer your services to a business, but this opportunity indicates there are additional services that clients want and need. Indeed as businesses continue to grow, then there will be more demand for this type of expertise.

Having been a producer for over 35 years, I fully recognise the need for all advisors to be conversant with the most elementary of tasks that a specific farmer has to perform in the calendar year. Advisors going on-farm offering their professional services without any knowledge of what that producer does, stand very little chance of striking up a successful relationship. The general population today is further removed from farming and food production than at any time in history. As generations pass, this will become more of a problem as farms become larger units and consequently farmers, by number, become less. So it is very important that we, as advisors, mentor the future professionals to ensure that they know the basics about agricultural production units in order that they can communicate on a reasonable level. As another incentive, scholarships are being introduced in 2014 for fulltime students in agriculture.

Agricultural graduates leaving our universities now have a wider range of jobs in which to pursue a career than ever before. At CAFA we are promoting to our members that they offer their younger staff a chance to attend chapter meetings and conferences in order that they can build up some basic knowledge about food production and the challenges that the producer faces in everyday modern farming. Our front-line producers and agribusinesses continue to seek top quality advice. Involvement in CAFA gives many opportunities to network, therefore gaining extra knowledge that enables us to offer specialist advice to clients. By remaining **Current, Connected** and **Certified**, we can be the professionals that the modern producers ask to provide a service.

Roger Mills CAFA National Chair