



Rabobank

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Primary producers to prepare for the bumpy road to recovery – leading agricultural banker

While the improving global economy is expected to have a positive impact on most agricultural sectors, primary producers will need to manage their operations in an increasingly volatile marketplace, according to Rabobank's group executive country banking Neil Dobbin.

Speaking at the opening of applications for this year's Rabobank Executive Development Program, Mr Dobbin said while the global economy is in recovery, it is expected to be a bumpy road, which will bring with it a period of commodity price volatility.

A key focus for this year's Rabobank Executive Development Program (EDP) will be to equip producers with a range of commercial management tools to help them cope with the increasingly unpredictable nature of agriculture.

"Leading producers understand, more than most, that they need to implement strategies to drive their business forward in this complex and competitive environment," Mr Dobbin said.

Now in its 11th year, the Rabobank Executive Development Program brings together leading farmers from across Australia and New Zealand and from a range of agricultural sectors to develop and enhance their business management skills.

"Going forward, this commodity price volatility is expected to lead to opportunities and challenges for agriculture in Australia and New Zealand. When it comes to taking advantage of these opportunities, it is important that producers are up-to-date with all the current practices, whether it be for markets, finances, business strategy or human resources," Mr Dobbin said.

EDP manager Skye Ward says that this year, more than ever, the program is focused on ensuring that attendees are exposed to the very latest in business management theories—as they apply to agriculture—that can assist them with taking their business to the next level.

"The producers that attend the EDP are at the forefront of their industries and already have extensive management experience, so we have to ensure that the program exposes them to new information and innovative skills that most people would not have access to," she says.

"With the EDP likened to a mini MBA but focussed directly at agricultural producers, it is ideal for men and women who want to enhance their farm business performance, but are unable to devote months on end to study."



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“The EDP is also a FarmReady approved course, so eligible Australian primary producers are able to claim up to \$1500 per financial year to attend the EDP,” Ms Ward says.

The program runs across two intensive week-long residential modules held approximately ten months apart and introduces participants to the latest practices in business management, leadership, strategy, finance, human resources, value chain management and marketing, and how these can be directly applied to their farm businesses.

Jon Welsh, a beef producer from Coolah in northern NSW, graduated from Rabobank’s EDP program in 2009 and says that the course inspired him to look outside the square.

“The EDP course really helped push me out of my comfort zone to think laterally and look for alternatives when I feel like I have hit a dead-end,” he says.

“The past five years have been tough in agriculture and it is easy to become lost in your own microcosm, particularly when your business has been focused on adapting and surviving rather than consolidation or expansion.

“The EDP put me in a position where I was expanding my skills and learning alongside primary producers that come from very different backgrounds but who are all very driven. Through the modules as well as the interaction with your peers it really helps you to grow both personally and professionally”.

Since completing the program, Mr Welsh has become even more interested in a subject that has had more impact on his life than any other, the weather.

“It has been said a man can be married for 50 years and never understand his wife. In the same manner I didn’t want to be farming for 50 years and not understand the climate,” he says.

“On our farm we can receive 350mm to 1100mm annual rainfall, it snows in winter and heatwaves can reach 42 degrees. Severe droughts made me realised I needed to do more on this topic, especially with livestock requiring a relatively constant plane of nutrition.

“Since attending the EDP I have thrown myself into finding ways that I can better understand the climate and in turn use this to help run the family business more effectively.”

Mr Welsh was even invited last year to Tokyo to give a talk on ‘the impact of Indo-Pacific climate on the agriculture of south eastern Australia’ at an international climate research conference.

Mr Dobbin says Mr Welsh is a great example of top producers, who manage the uncertainties facing their business to retain a competitive edge, as a result of completing the EDP.



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“Just taking that little bit of time out of the day-to-day running of the business to look at the bigger picture and the direction you would like to take, can have a huge impact on producers, sometimes in ways they did not expect,” he says.

“The face of agriculture is rapidly changing and attending the Executive Development Program is one way to ensure that you remain in front of that change, and able to take advantage of the effect it might have on your business.”

Applications for Rabobank’s 2010 Executive Development Program are open until 28 May 2010 and only 36 applicants will be accepted from across a range of commodities and geographical locations in Australia and New Zealand. The first module runs from 22-27 August in Sydney, with the second module taking place in July of next year.

Producers that would like an application form or any further information on the Rabobank EDP are encouraged to contact Skye Ward. Phone: 02 8115 4139 Email: bmp@rabobank.com or Visit: www.rabobank.com.au/bmp

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