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A promising group of Australian sugar industry members prepared to lead the way.....



The Australian sugar industry can be assured its future is in good hands, with ten young people from a range of sectors – production, research, extension, harvesting and milling taking part in the inaugural national **Advance in Sugar** Leadership Development Program that commenced on the 20th of November in Cairns.

The participants were joined at dinner by the Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries, the Hon Tim Mulherin who was extremely supportive of the program and the commitment and courage being shown by the participants as they prepare to take on leadership roles within the sugar industry.

The **Advance in Sugar** Leadership Development Program supported by the Sugar Research and Development Corporation equips participants to **effectively participate in, and represent** their industry. It is a six month Program, which includes three residential skill sessions in Cairns, Brisbane and Canberra.

The program focuses on developing leadership skills of the future leaders of the sugar industry. The participants are provided with the opportunity to apply the skills they learn in the sessions to an industry project which they are required to design and implement during the program.

Project outcomes will be presented to mentors and industry, business, community and political leaders at the final session in Canberra in May 2008.

Minister Mulherin said that to take part in such a program is an opportunity that as participants the group would both enjoy and be challenged by. He also noted that there would now be an expectation on them as participants, to contribute to, and make a difference to, the Queensland sugar industry.

"This is the inaugural National Leadership Development Program for the sugar industry and that's exciting because it means that the sugar industry recognises that it is critical to train their members to build the future of the industry, rather than hope the new crop of leaders will just pick up ideas as they go," Minister Mulherin said.

"We can see the outcomes of good leadership by not only the outcomes achieved, but also by the people who have been led," he said.

For the program participants, the first session provided a valuable platform for networking and self development.

Matthew Sykes, grower and harvester in NSW stated that: "I learnt how to effectively get my message across to the right people in Government. I also realised that a positive attitude is one thing but acting on it is what will make a difference."

"The new skills I gained at the first session will certainly assist me in the future, both on and off the farm." Lee Blackburn, Grower from the Mackay region stated.

Philip Deguara, Grower from the Mackay region stated that "The program made me realise that other young people from all sectors share my positive outlook for the industry."

"This program provided me with the opportunity to make strategic alliances across all sectors of the industry. I also learnt the importance of constructive feedback." Nicole Thompson, from BSES Indooroopilly stated.

Industry leaders were invited to present their perspective of the sugar industry and its future to the participants. Mr Bob Rossi, Grower and Graduate of the Australian Rural Leadership Program, spoke to the group about the need for personal development and commended the development of these sorts of programs which invest in building the future leadership of the industry.

"Personal development is the key to success, read widely and look at other commodities to see what they are doing. The sugar industry needs to do things differently now, not in ten years time," he said.

"We need people who are prepared to lead and make decisions on behalf of industry, people who have the ability to identify what is wrong and people who will get in and fix it - not just talk about it. As leaders, your decisions are not always popular but if you believe in what you are doing, you can make people stop and think and work to bring about positive change for the better of the industry," he said.

Another speaker at the first session was Dr Diana Maldonado, Research and Development Investment Manager for the Sugar Research and Development Corporation (SRDC). She was delighted with the enthusiasm from the group and thoroughly enjoyed working with them to strengthen the alliance between the Government and the production/milling/extension sectors.

"I appreciated the opportunity to contribute to the first session of the Advance in Sugar Leadership Program I realised that there is a lot of potential within the group and a lot of fresh ideas for taking the industry forward. SRDC is keen to work with young people in the industry to make their ideas become a reality," said Dr Maldonado.

Industry leaders, the Sugar Research and Development Corporation and the Program facilitators look forward to the ongoing success of the **Advance in Sugar** Development Program and feel positive about the contribution this group of young people will make to the industry in the future by applying their new skills and knowledge to their own enterprises and the broader industry.

"In today's climate, leadership is not about a single decision maker, but rather everyone has a valuable contribution to make," said Ms Cheryl Phillips, Principal Facilitator, Leading Industries.

"If we can form diverse groups of stakeholders to be involved in the decision making the outcome is likely to be much better for industry than if one person is left with the responsibility," she said.

Minister Mulherin said that the reform in terms of a working relationship between the sugar industry and the government in recent years has been essential in developing the skills and the capability needed to adapt to the rapid changes occurring in the global market place in which the sugar industry operates today.

"But, this is just the start – you, as future leaders of the sugar industry, need to be prepared for, and make happen, a vastly different future for sugarcane," he said.

The Program has been developed and is delivered by Leading Industries with support from the Sugar Research and Development Corporation.

For more information please contact Cheryl Phillips, Principal Facilitator/General Manager, Leading Industries on 0407519992 or Kelly Tape, Training Coordinator, Leading Industries, on 0408850110.