

Balancing Act a Winner for Leading Dairy Farmer

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Mastering the balance between work and life has seen dairy farmer, Steve Garrett collect Rabobank's Executive Development Program (EDP) Management Project Award.

Mr Garrett was one of 36 leading primary producers from around Australia and New Zealand who recently graduated from the EDP, a business management program designed to further enhance the skills of Australasia's leading agricultural producers.

Returning to Sydney in July this year to complete the EDP, Mr Garrett was presented with the prize for best management project by Neil Dobbin, Head of Rural Banking for Rabobank Australia and New Zealand at a graduation dinner for participants and their partners held at the historic Gunners' Barracks in Sydney last month.

Run in two modules held nine months apart, the EDP sees each participant undertake a self-designed management project in the break between modules, applying the business and management skills they gained from the first module to their own business, with the aim of obtaining tangible results.

Kobie Tesoriero, Rabobank's Business Programs manager said that Mr Garrett was chosen as the ultimate winner as he had drawn on information presented in module one and made significant changes to himself and his business approach, particularly focusing on his work-life balance which allowed him to reassess where his business, located in the north-west corner of the South Island in New Zealand, was taking both himself and his family.

"Steve and his family have successfully mapped out a new direction for the business that will give them more financial freedom, decrease pressure and create more time. Importantly it will also put them in a position to capitalise on opportunities as they arise," she said.

Mr Garrett said that after returning from the first week of the EDP he sat down with his wife Jenny and three teenaged children – daughter Sammy and sons Danny and Jake – and asked; is there a better way? Are we still following our passion and working towards our original vision of having a sustainable and enjoyable dairy farming business that allows us to support our children's ambitions?

Mr Garrett said that the answer was a definitive 'no'. Despite substantial business growth, the pressures of increased debt, a labour shortage and less and less personal time were not sustainable in the long-run and not something they, as a family, were willing to trade-off.

"I always thought I had work and life in perfect balance - my work was my life and my life was my work. But by learning more about myself through the EDP – my management style, my strengths and weaknesses, what I value - I realised something fundamental – big is not always better.

"To me success was wealth then happiness. Not any more – happiness, as course presenter Iain McCormick of the Executive Coaching Centre stated, is not about money it is about subjective health, relationships and a purpose beyond yourself."

Ms Tesoriero says that striking a balance between work and life is often an illusive goal for those in primary production, particularly because their workplace is also their home.

"People who are in the business of primary production are passionate about it – they live and breathe it. Investing time in your personal well being and enjoying your family shouldn't be to the detriment of productivity, it can actually help it," she says.

The EDP incorporated the session on work life balance in 2004 precisely because it is seen as best practice in agriculture, Ms Tesoriero added. "Having a good balance is seen as something that enhances performance and this is extremely important as the pressures of floods and drought, exchange rates and labour shortages mount."

"This is not the end game but a repositioning," Mr Garrett says of his change in direction. "I'm confident that with the map that we have drawn as a family, we are working towards ownership of a very successful business – one where success is not measured simply by physical growth, and I think this new kind of success already smells a lot sweeter."

Contact

For further information please contact Denise Shaw, Public Relations Manager (Tel: +61 2 8115 2744) or email on sydney.mediarelations@rabobank.com.

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