



Victorian Food Industry Training Board



Final Report

Food Processing Industry
Study Tour Pilot Project,
Barwon South West Region

October 2006

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1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY TOUR & KEY INFORMATION

1.1 Key Purpose of Tour

- Create improved awareness of the career opportunities in the industry and to inform the development of skills as required by industry in tertiary level students.

1.2 Aims of Tour

- To explore the possibility of a sustainable model for undertaking student visits
- Strengthening industry and educational partnerships and ensuring educational institutes are able to effectively interface with industry and visa a versa.
- Longer term aim of the project is that by bringing companies and the relevant educational institutes into direct contact with one another relationships will be built that enable further tours and engage students in work placements, practicum's and Graduate Programs that assist industry with the recruitment of appropriate people in regional areas.

1.3 Tour Dates

The tour was run on Tuesday the 26th and Wednesday the 27th of September. These dates were chosen due to being during the Semester 2 University break which, in 2006, was between the 23rd of September and the 1st of October.

1.4 Stakeholders

Institutes/Students Involved

The institutes and students that were involved in the study tour are from the following courses:

- Bachelor of Food Science and Nutrition
- Bachelor of Engineering (Chemical)
- Bachelor of Food Science
- Bachelor of Engineering (Chemical)/ Bachelor of Science

The participating institutes were:

- Deakin University
- Monash University
- Melbourne University
- RMIT

Other stakeholders

- CRF Colac Otway
- Warrnambool Cheese and Butter Factory
- Murray Goulburn Co-operative, Koroit
- Timboon Farmhouse Cheese
- Local Learning Employment Network, South West Victoria
- National Foods, Cobden
- Students and teachers from the participating institutes
- Dairy Process Engineering Centre – Food Science
- Regional Development Victoria
- Economic Development Bodies

1.5 List of Participants of Pilot Tour



All participants ready for the tour of the plant at CRF

1.6 Guests at Networking Dinner



Michael Parrot from National Foods describes his career path for students at the dinner.

1.7 Company Representatives on Tours



Rebecca Michalik and Lindsay Riches described the processes at CRF

2. METHODOLOGY

The pilot tour was developed in two stages, according to the visit component of the “Food Industry Strategy – Student Visit/Industry Placement Coordination” delivered by VFITB in 2005. The first stage was a scoping and research stage where the contacts list was built and the suitable companies in the region were engaged for participation in the tour. In this phase meetings were also held with key people to provide advice on the structure and components of the tour. Meetings included:

- Deakin University
- Regional Development Victoria
- Dairy Process Engineering Centre

The next stage of the pilot tour development consisted of the actual organisation of the tour and the corresponding activities. These included, but were not limited to, the following:

- Development of the itinerary and gaining commitment from stakeholders to participate
- Sourcing and booking of suitable accommodation
- Promotional flyer designed, printed and distributed (See Appendix 1)
- Registration of the students to participating in the tour
- Final consultations with the companies involved to organise on site tour guides, speakers and timing of the tours
- Organisation of a network dinner including final guest list, venue, guest speakers and invitations

In order to achieve a sustainable program and enable work placements the tour provided a model approach that can be subsequently applied on an ongoing basis. This was achieved by identifying and engaging the appropriate local representatives and utilising existing regional industry/education networks as well as other stakeholders in creating and promoting a mutually beneficial program. Stakeholders included, but are not restricted to:

- Regional food enterprises;
- Informal and formal industry networks;
- Educational and training institutes;
- Students;
- Local government and
- Local Learning Employment Networks.

The main outcomes of the project methodology were:

- Organisation of all aspects of the pilot tour to the Barwon South West region of Victoria, as listed above
- Establishment of a ‘regional contacts group’ through the companies involved and guests to attend the networking dinner
- Establishment of institute contacts from the participating institutes

3. TOUR DETAILS

The tour was run over two days from September 26th to September 27th 2006. The brief itinerary for the tour was as follows:

DAY 1: Tuesday, 26th September

- 7:45am** Arrive Deakin University, Burwood Campus if you are leaving from this destination
- 8:00am** Tour bus departs Deakin University, Burwood Campus (Car Park 1, off Holland Avenue, Entrance 1)
- 9:00am** Pick up point #2 – Food Science Australia (671 Sneydes Rd., Werribee)
- 9:30am** Pick up point #3 – Geelong Train Station (off La Trobe Terrace, Geelong)
- 10:30am** CRF Lamb Processor Tour, Colac
- 2:30pm** Warrnambool Cheese & Butter Factory Tour
- 5:00pm** Free time at Accommodation
- 6:15pm** Bus departs for dinner venue
- 6:30pm** Tour Dinner: Images Restaurant, Warrnambool
- 10:00pm** Dinner Concludes



Students touring a dairy processing plant



Lindsay Ferguson, Industry Specialist from Regional Development Victoria welcomes everyone to the 'Great South Coast Region' at the dinner for all participants held at Image Restaurant, Warrnambool.

DAY 2: Wednesday, 27th September

- 7:00am** Breakfast available at accommodation (included in room rate of \$23)
- 7:45am** Begin loading gear into bus ready to depart
- 8:00am** Leave Accommodation for Murray Goulburn Co-op tour
- 8:30am** Murray Goulburn Co-op Tour Begins
- 11:00am** Morning Tea; Allansford Cheeseworld (if time allows)
- 12:00pm** Sightseeing and lunch, Port Campbell
- 1:30pm** Timboon Farmhouse Cheese visit & optional tasting
- 4:30pm** Drop off point #1 – Shell Service Station opposite Geelong Train Station, off La Trobe Terrace, Geelong
- 5:00pm** Drop off point #2 – Food Science Australia (671 Sneydes Rd., Werribee)
- 6:00pm** Tour ends, Deakin University, Burwood Campus (Car Park 1, off Holland Avenue, Entrance 1)

4. TOUR EVALUATION

The pilot tour was evaluated by three parties:

- Pilot tour participants (including three University lecturers)
- Companies involved
- Institutes involved

The tour was evaluated using a hard copy evaluation form for participants (See Appendix 2) and e-mail responses to a questionnaire as well as phone conversations between the VFITB Project Manager and the companies involved.

4.1 Participant Evaluation Data

The participant's views on the pilot tour were gathered using an evaluation form that was distributed on the trip back to Melbourne after the tour visits had been completed.

General Data

General data on the participant group is as follows; 18 of the 20 participants were students of four separate institutes undertaking the courses outlined in section 1 of the report. All students were either in 3rd or 4th year of their studies. The remaining two participants were Food Science and Nutrition lecturers at Deakin University, Burwood. For the purposes of this evaluation, they are included in the population of 20. A total of 65% of the participants had toured a food plant before.

Specific data regarding the tours shows a total of 70% of the participants found the pilot tour to be "Extremely Relevant" to their studies and to their work as a lecturer, the remaining 30% found the tour to be "Somewhat Relevant" with no participants finding the tour "Not at all relevant".

General Tour Evaluation

When asked what part/s of the tour the participants enjoyed the most and why, the comments illustrated that the actual tours to companies were enjoyed most, with the dinner and the opportunity to visit the Warrnambool region also mentioned. Some responses included:

- *"Tour of the dairy factory, interacting with staff and further understanding the role of the chemical engineer in the dairy industry"*
- *"The food industry visits gave insight into the food industry operation and the career presentation gave us opportunities to meet and speak with food industry professionals"*
- *"Talking with plant tour leaders enjoyable, gaining insight into the cultures of the organisation, stories of how people got to where they are now"*
- *"Dinner especially, learnt a lot about career options, very inspired"*
- *"Seeing a region I had never seen before, different facilities & processes of the companies"*
- *"Tours interesting, friendly people; whale watching, fresh air; dinner, good to learn about culture of industry"*

The feedback on the parts of the tour that were enjoyed the least by the participants was mostly regarding the visit to the abattoir. Although viewed as informative, the visit was found to be "confronting", "a little extreme" and a "disturbing experience". The other general comments regarded some participant's lack of interest in a particular area of the industry, or are within the company tours. Additionally, feedback on the requirement of the tour to be longer was evident, with comments such as "tiring" and "long days".

Tour Improvements

Suggestions from the participants regarding how the tour could be improved ranged from visiting a broader range of industry on the tour, having more time to discuss careers with the tour leaders and company staff and having more time for the tour. Other comments suggested that students would like better accommodation, more flexible drop off and pick up points and the chance to enjoy the area visited with some free time. Additionally, the theme of having students who are studying the same course/discipline on tours together was suggested for the tour to be more specific and useful to those students.

The Networking Dinner

The networking dinner was viewed as “Extremely Valuable” by 65% of participants, whilst 25% believed it was “Somewhat Valuable” and 5% “Not at all valuable”. The parts of the dinner that were found to be valuable were the guest speakers, in particular, the students finding it valuable to hear their career stories, about where they currently work and the opportunities available within the industry. The dinner was also found to be valuable in providing an opportunity for the students to network. Some comments regarding the value of the dinner and being able to hear others career stories were:

- *“It was great to speak to food representatives regarding their experiences”*
- *“I found hearing about opportunities within companies very interesting”*
- *“Very valuable, [to hear other’s career stories] has given me some direction about what I want to do”*
- *“They [the guest speakers] are very inspiring how they have worked their way up to be managers”*

Perceptions of the Food Processing Industry

When asked if their understanding of the Food Processing Industry as a result of the tour, 60% of respondents said “Yes” their understanding had improved with the remaining 40% stating that their understanding had not been altered. For those who responded “Yes” to this question, examples of the main ways in which their understanding had improved are outlined below:

- *“I now have a good general understanding of the food process environment”*
- *“I have a better understanding now and find it interesting”*
- *“Aware of more career options”*
- *“Appreciate it more, good to know where food comes from, how its made & the work that goes into it”*
- *“Tour was well planned, detail of the facility operation, company people talks were very valuable”*

In measuring the success of the tour, 95% of participants stated that they would recommend to other students to undertake a tour similar to the pilot tour. Additionally, 90% of the participants stated that they would consider taking a job in a regional area and 100% were willing to work in a metropolitan area.

4.2 Company Evaluation Data

The companies involved were asked a series of evaluation questions (see Appendix 3) via phone and e-mail.

The first question asked what the difficulties that the companies would face when undertaking the organisation of a tour similar to the pilot tour ran by VFITB. Some difficulties included:

- Staff availability (including those to fill shifts whilst staff run the tour)
- Time (of staff to organise and run tour)
- Notice of the tour (at least one month)
- Co-ordination and planning of tour so that all stakeholders can gain a lot from the tour
- Limit of numbers that can comfortably be taken on a tour

Value of Tours

- Chance for companies to dispel “old fashioned” perception of the food industry; now a high tech industry with robotics systems and biotechnology
- Companies can promote themselves and the industry in general and demonstrate their achievements and contribution to the economy
- Companies can promote their employment opportunities and their work culture, including the benefits of living and working in a regional area
- Allows businesses to remain aware of the younger people moving through into the industry and their needs
- Placements could be set up to give students real engagement with food processing enterprises
- Projects could be undertaken between the companies and the students for their assessment; could set up a “buddy system” between the companies and the students
- Opportunity to ask students, the next generation of employees, what they want out of a work placement and job

Work Placements

- Half of the companies visited have involvement in work placements in some form
- Seasonality of work needs to be a consideration when arranging work placements
- Opportunities do exist within companies for flexible work placements at casual rates of pay
- Contacts were provided on the tour for institutes follow up regarding work placement opportunities

Barriers to Work Placements

- Expectations of the students through their curriculum need to match was the company can showcase
- Finding a student to ‘fit’ the job and the organisation can be a barrier to work placement success
- The times of operation of the plants e.g. one plant operated for 24hrs a day for 7 months of the year
- The training and supervision required is time consuming for the allocated ‘supervisor’

Target Type (of students)

- Larger companies (such as Murray Goulburn Co-operative) are multi faceted and could therefore cater for a variety of student 'types'
- CRF (Colac Otway) specified that they have a particular need for engineering and IT students, but require a range of skills within their organisation

4.3 Institute Evaluation Data

The institutes involved were asked a series of evaluation questions (see Appendix 3) via phone and e-mail. The questions posed to institutes varied slightly, with only four of the five industry questions being included in the institute evaluation.

In response to the first question regarding the difficulties faced by institutes in organising and undertaking a tour, the following difficulties were found:

- Cost of attendance for students and the resulting lack of numbers (any support to lower the cost for students is greatly appreciated)
- Timing must be able to work with the student's timetables and trainers commitments
- Requires excellent working relationships with companies which found to be difficult to obtain
- Time required to organise the tour (transport, accommodation, permission and details of the plant tours etc.) is onerous

Value of Tours

- Essential from an educational/training perspective; for students to experience the industry is invaluable to their studies
- Development of networks with industry partners for the institute (may lead to focusing the curriculum to target industry trends and needs)
- Assist trainers of food processing related courses to have students who have an understanding of the industry and the workings of a company
- Students are able to develop networks with industry
- Develops a practical aspect to a course, therefore institutes are able to deliver a higher standard of training which, in turn, results in more future employees of the industry
- Increases the enthusiasm of students to be involved in work placements

Work Placements

- Extremely important in providing on-site training for students in various areas of the industry leading to career development
- Work placements allow students to gain the experience sought after by industry
- Essential for industry to be able to gain employees who are well educated theoretically and practically, are capable of junior management positions with the potential to remain in the industry and move up within the organisation
- Placements are essential to increasing the awareness of the careers and job roles available within the food processing industry, especially in the field of process engineering.

Barriers to Work Placements

- Commitment from industry partners for work practicum's/work projects; requires structured support from management of the food industry companies
- Promoting the benefits of work placements to companies was found to be difficult in some cases
- Complexities in the student being able to deliver the quality outcomes required by a work placement or project and the company being satisfied to a level that they will continue to support placements and projects

5. ANALYSIS OF OUTCOMES

The pilot tour was viewed as a success by participants, the companies involved and by the trainers from the institutes involved. Participants gained not only an increased awareness of the food processing industry, but information relevant to their studies and to their future career choices. Participants were able to meet a variety of industry representatives through both the tours and the networking dinner whilst experiencing a regional destination.

The main outcomes of the pilot tour were the following:

General

- Many varied relationships between the industry, local government and the institutes involved were established.
- A suitable format, content and delivery for future Food Processing Student Awareness Tours was delivered
- Networking dinner was very well received; students especially enjoying hearing industry representatives speak about their career pathways

Participants

- Participants gained a greater awareness of the food processing industry
- Work placement interest with the companies visited was high
- 90% of participants would consider taking a job in a regional area
- Students gained the opportunity to network with company representatives

Companies

- Contacts were provided on the tour for institutes follow up regarding work placement opportunities
- Can showcase a high tech, innovative industry with many varied career prospects
- Promotion of employment opportunities and work culture, including benefits of living and working in a regional area
- Allows greater awareness of future employees' needs
- Placements opportunities could arise directly from tour and the relationships formed
- Possibility of projects between the companies and the students for their assessment

Institutes

- Participating institutes made contacts with the LLEN representative with a view to linking to facilitate work placements
- University lecturers may integrate dairy specific content into the curriculum
- Development of networks with industry partners for the institute

6. CHALLENGES

The development and delivery of the pilot tour presented a range of challenges. In order for the visit component of the project proposal to be implemented (tours in various regions around Victoria involving many institutes) these challenges need to be addressed and overcome. The main challenges encountered were:

Cost of tour

- It was found that institutes, although extremely supportive of the tour model and having their students participate, do not have adequate funds in their department budgets to fund any part of the tours, therefore students had to pay for their own accommodation.
- Cost of the overnight tours for students could be problematic if they do not get adequate (2 months) notice about the tour, and the associated costs. This will become a planning challenge in scheduling the tours throughout the calendar year.

Operational aspects of the tour

- The dates that the tours can be run are largely restricted by students' course work commitments such as lectures, tutorials and exams. The pilot tour was run in the Semester break; however, this may prove to be a challenge in gaining student participation.
- Local government and company staff were found to be impacted by the school year holidays. Many of the people contacted to be involved in the tour had to work around school holiday breaks. This needs to be a consideration when planning tour dates and any subsequent work placement.
- The time that is required to get to the regional companies and the time required to tour the companies was underestimated. The two day tour was viewed as too short by both participants and organisers.
- The numbers in tour groups at the larger companies is often limited to 24 on a tour, split up into three groups of eight. The smaller companies could not take more than this amount due to size of the establishments.

Project Management

- Time to organise the tours was extensive and required project management and officer skills, a minimum of 20 days full time, to organise and run a two day tour and follow up and facilitate contacts.
- The following main tasks undertaken by VFITB were time consuming and required knowledge of food processing companies and educational training providers. The tasks were:
 - Engage with stakeholders to source appropriate contacts from companies, local government in the region, institutes and students
 - Develop a draft itinerary (subject to companies availability and student tour date limitations)
 - Distribute a draft itinerary and negotiation of time frames and dates and tour guides
 - Design, develop, print and distribute the promotional material
 - Organise transport and accommodation for participants
 - Organise networking dinner; venue, meal and AV requirements
 - Source, contact and engage suitable guest speakers for the networking dinner

Commitment from companies

- Gaining commitment from companies took time as they are very busy and need to check the availability of staff and that the requested date and time fits in with the company schedule (e.g. audits and cleaning time).
- Finding the appropriate person to deal with in the company, in terms of running a student tour to the facility, was time consuming.
- The tours are essentially an inconvenience for the company as they are large businesses that run on lean production teams, they therefore require ample lead time to organise tours.
- The in kind contribution of the time of the staff at the companies who are showing the group around is also a commitment for the managers and staff involved involving roster changes and, in some cases, replacement staff.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were drawn from the analysis of the tour evaluation data and the challenges found in the development and delivery of the tour:

- The tours should be a minimum of two days in length when visiting regional areas, with an ideal time frame of three days; as strongly suggested by the participants
- Tours should include a greater variety of companies
- The tours would benefit from being more tailored to particular disciplines and subsequently involve the appropriate tertiary courses and companies; this will allow for the tours to be more beneficial for all stakeholders and more interesting for the participating students
- Funding should allow for appropriate human resources in the organisation of the tours
- Planning should ensure that tour dates are set well in advance to allow for the appropriate advertising of the tour thus providing adequate notice to students to ensure maximum attendance at all tours and so companies can organise tour guides
- Tours should be limited to 18-22 participants, allowing for staff members to also go on the tour bus, for companies not to be overwhelmed and makes accommodation easier to organise. This number maximises the opportunities for stakeholders and justifies the time spent organising the tour.
- More time at the companies for students to ask detailed questions and for the companies to ascertain the perceptions students have of the industry and their career expectations.

8. STATEMENT OF EXPENDITURE

Information Removed

Signed:

Ian Nicolson
Executive Officer
VFITB

APPENDIX 1: Pilot Tour Promotional Flyer

APPENDIX 2: Pilot Tour Evaluation Form

**Food Industry Student Awareness Tour
South West Victoria**

EVALUATION FORM

1. What are where are you currently studying?

Course: _____

University: _____

2. Did you find the Student Tour relevant to your studies? Please tick

Extremely Relevant

Somewhat Relevant

Not at all relevant

3. What part/s of the tour did you enjoy the most and why?

4. What part/s of the tour did you enjoy least and why?

5. What aspects of the tour could be improved?

6. If there was an industry work placement opportunity which company/ies would you like to undertake the work placement?

- Murray Goulburn Co-Operative
- Warrnambool Cheese and Butter Factory
- CRF Colac Otway

7. Which particular part, or parts, of the operation you would like the work placement to encompass and why?

8. What skills would you most like to explore in a work placement?

9. What time of the year would be most suitable for you to undertake a work placement?

10. What length work placement would best suit your needs?

11. Would you be able to source your own accommodation?

12. How valuable did you find the networking dinner? Please tick:

- Extremely Relevant Somewhat Relevant Not at all relevant

13. What aspects of the networking dinner did you find valuable?

14. How valuable did you find it to hear other people's career stories?

15. Has your understanding of the Food Processing Industry changes as a result of the tour? Please tick:

Yes No

15.1 If your understanding has changed, how has it changed?

15.2 Have you visited/toured a food plant before?

Yes No

16. Would you consider taking a job in the food processing industry in a regional area?

16.1 In a metropolitan company?

17. Would you recommend other students that they undertake a tour like this?

Yes No

18. Any other comments/feedback?

APPENDIX 3: Pilot Tour Evaluation Questions, Stakeholders

Pilot Tour Evaluation Questions – University and TAFE Stakeholders

1. What difficulties do you face in undertaking such a tour (say if you were to organise it also)?

2. What value do you see in the tour?

3. What is your view on industry placements? Are they valuable- what difficulties do you face?

- 3a. What difficulties do you face?

4. Are there any barriers to undertaking the above? If so what are they?

Pilot Tour Evaluation Questions - Companies and Other Stakeholders

1. What difficulties do you face in undertaking such a tour (say if you were to organise it also)?

2. What value do you see in the tour?

3. What is your view on industry placements? Are they valuable- what difficulties do you face?

4. Are there any barriers to undertaking the above? If so what are they?

5. Would prefer we target a particular area of study?

- 5a. What area would you most prefer?