

Horticulture Innovation Australia

Final Report

Next Generation Leadership Workshops for the Turf Industry 2012-2015

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Turf Australia Limited

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Summary

Based on the feedback received, the three NxGen Forums held from 2013 to 2015 have achieved the original project aims, which were:

- Leadership development within the Turf Industry
- Improved knowledge and skills (personal, professional & business) within the industry
- An increased positive outlook for the turf industry and career options within by the younger generation
- Increased uptake of R&D and national marketing issues.

The Australian Turf Industry all but solely consists of family owned and run businesses. Many of these businesses have a younger generation, 18 to 40 year olds, who are actively working on the farms and intend to take full control and ownership of the turf growing business in the future. This younger generation was the target audience for the NxGen program.

The project has enable three NxGen Forums to be held, each with an informative program of presentations and field visits:

- Twin Waters, QLD, May 2015 (55 participants)
- Windsor, NSW, May 2014 (54 participants)
- Tamborine Mountain, QLD January 2013 (35 participants).



One of the practical learning sessions at the 2015 Turf Australia NxGen Forum included conducting soil profile analysis.

The key outputs from this project include:

- Increased understanding of the national industry R&D and Marketing programs
- Increased collaboration and professional networking within the turf industry, particularly with its younger members
- Improved skills in personal, professional and business management
- Increased knowledge of technical turf growing issues.

The project outputs have led to significant outcomes for the industry, such as:

- Increased personal and professional development of the younger generation within the turf industry
- A greater understanding of leadership skills
- Improved professional networks within the turf industry
- An enhanced and positive outlook for the turf industry
- Greater use and understanding of the outputs from the national R&D and marketing programs.

Given the overwhelming positive feedback that has been received regarding the NxGen Forums and the predominantly family owned and run businesses within the turf industry, there is an ongoing need to support the professional development of the next generation of turf farmers. Providing turf industry specific, leadership development programs through regular, annual forums has proven to be very successful and should continue.



Feedback from the 2015 Turf Australia NxGen Forum, May 2015, indicated it was the best NxGen Forum ever.

Keywords

Next Generation; NxGen; Leadership; Leadership development; Capacity building.

Introduction

The Turf Industry, like many other rural industries, is characterised by having a predominately older generation running the majority of business. As a result, the industry recognises the need to encourage leadership and career development within the industry and this is reflected in the Turf industry R&D Strategic Investment Plan (SIP), 2012-2017.

In addition, the turf industry has predominantly family run, small to small/medium sized businesses. Many of these businesses have a younger generation, 18 to 40 year olds, who are actively working on the farms and intend to take full control and ownership of the turf growing business in the future.

In February 2012, Turf Australia (TA) developed and hosted (using TA funds) a "Next Gen" forum at Echuca, Victoria, which was considered highly successful. The feedback received from forum participants was extremely positive and a recommendation was made to TA for the event to be held annually.

Topics covered at the February 2012 event included: Succession Planning; Communication Skills; Marketing Facts & Fiction; Turning Paddocks into Profit; Social Media; Sales & Marketing; Farming for the Future; Open Forum – Round table; Farm Tours.

A Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL, now known as Horticulture Innovation Australia - HIA) funding proposal was developed, based upon the successful '2012 Next Gen Forum' that was developed and funded by TA. The annual forum program had leadership development and field visits components.

The aim of holding annual forums was to encourage and promote leadership development for the next generation of turf growers, increase business management skills and communicate relevant R&D and Industry Marketing information to the participants and wider through the various industry communication channels. Participation was open to all under 40's within the turf industry who had a desire to learn and pursue a career within the industry.



Participants at the 2014 Turf Australia NxGen Forum, Windsor NSW.

Feedback was collected at each forum and used to help create the agenda and determine the focus and location of following forums.

The project was also run in conjunction with the Future Leader and International Networking program, project TU11706, as well as the national Business & Industry Development program, project TU13004.

The current HIA Chairman, Selwyn Snell, and the then HAL Board, reviewed the turf industry Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) 2012-17 and wrote to the then chair of the Turf Industry Advisory Committee (IAC) on 21 May 2013 and stated:

"I can advise that the HAL Board has approved the Turf Strategic Investment Plan and in doing so noted the following:

- That the sector has approximately 260 growers that in most cases manage their entire supply chain to the end consumer.*
- That the Australian turf industry has a strong international alliance with Turf Producers International in the USA.*
- That the plan has provided economic justification against each strategic objective.*
- That the plan takes a short term 'back to basics' approach with a strong emphasis on extension, capacity building and industry development, and that this has led to a bias on communication activities that targets growers."*

This strong endorsement from Selwyn Snell and the formal HAL Board for the turf industry to invest in and focus on extension, capacity building and industry development continues to be the case now and into the foreseeable future.



Delegates on farm during the 2014 Turf Australia NxGen Forum, Windsor NSW.

Methodology

The annual Next Generation Forums were held at different locations through Australia. The program consisted of forum presentations and farm tours utilising presenters from both within and external to the turf industry.

The 2015 NxGen Forum was held at Twin Waters, QLD, May 2015 (55 participants), in 2014 it was Windsor, NSW, May 2014 (54 participants) and in 2013, Tamborine Mountain, QLD January 2013 (35 participants).

Each annual forum agenda was confirmed 3 months prior to each event and the feedback received from the previous year was used to help design following forums. Each forum contained components of:

- Personal development
- Business management
- Finance management
- Turf technical information
- Industry development
- National R&D and marketing initiatives.

Participation was encouraged for anyone in the industry under 40 years of age and who demonstrated a willingness to learn and pursue a career in the turf industry. Information presented at each workshop was also disseminated via the various industry communication channels, such as the TA website, Industry Magazine, etc.

The 2015 NxGen forum held at Twin Waters QLD in May, see appendix A for a copy of the agenda. This most recent forum received feedback from delegates saying it was the best Nx Gen Forum ever, with 100% of participants saying that they would recommend others attend the forum in their feedback.

The participant feedback from the 2015 NxGen Forum (appendix B) indicates they gained a lot of knowledge and motivation not only from the educational sessions but also from networking, particularly during the welcome and formal dinner, farm and local business tours. They felt that the networking sessions were a good opportunity to share knowledge, and recognised that without the NxGen Forum, they would never get an opportunity to meet so many likeminded farmers from the turf industry.

Also, the teambuilding activity was a huge success and demonstrated how to work better together with colleagues. They were also interested to see how other businesses, including turf and non-turf, operate. The 2015 forum has had the largest attendance to date and it is hoped that this will only increase in years to come, assuming HIA support is forthcoming. With guidance from the feedback received, Turf Australia will be able to further improve the outcome of future forums.

Outputs

Comprehensive feedback was received from each annual NxGen Forum and indicated the following outputs were obtained. Appendix B contains the feedback from the 2015 NxGen Forum and milestone report 105 and 103 contains the detailed feedback received from the 2014 and 2013 NxGen forums, respectively.

The NxGen program has enabled:

- Increased understanding of the national industry R&D and Marketing programs
- Increased collaboration and professional networking within the turf industry, particularly with its younger members
- Improved skills in personal, professional and business management
- Increased knowledge of technical turf growing issues.

In addition, the three NxGen Forums received widespread coverage in the Turf Australia Industry Magazines, TurfCraft magazines as well as through the industry website and E-newsletters, etc.

In the Autumn 2015 edition of the quarterly industry magazine, the forthcoming NxGen speakers and topics were featured on pages 16 to 20 and pages 6-13 of the Winter 2015 edition featured the 2015 NxGen Forum presentations and activities.

The Autumn 2014 edition, pages 14 to 17, of the industry Magazine featured the 2014 NxGen speakers and topics and in the Winter 2014 edition featured NxGen on pages 22 to 27.

And in the Summer 2013 edition of the industry Magazine, the NxGen speakers and topics were featured on pages 8 to 16 and the Autumn 2013 edition featured NxGen on pages 8 to 12.

Outcomes

Based on the feedback received, see appendix B, the NxGen program has led to significant outcomes for the industry, including:

- Increased personal and professional development of the younger generation within the turf industry
- A greater understanding of leadership skills
- Improved professional networks within the turf industry
- An enhanced and positive outlook for the turf industry
- Greater use and understanding of the outputs from the national R&D and marketing programs.



Keen, young turf growers at Tinamba Turf during the 2013 Turf Australia NxGen Forum, QLD.

Evaluation and Discussion

The most recent NxGen Forum was held at Novotel Twin Waters on Queensland's Sunshine Coast, 10-12 May, 2015. The delegates heard key messages ranging from the importance of paying the turf levy, networking, optimizing fertilizer and chemical usage, adopting change management and the need to re-focus on work safety.

The Forum began on a Sunday evening, and the majority of attendees were from Queensland and New South Wales. Turf Australia's Richard Stephens opened the forum by setting the scene and identifying participant objectives. He also helped break the ice with a getting to know you exercise which included every person standing, introducing themselves and sharing why they have attended the forum. The activity revealed that most delegates wanted to network within the industry because they recognized the importance of learning from their peers.

Horticulture Innovation Australia's (HIA) Craig Perring explained about the changes occurring within HIA during the transition from Horticulture Australia Limited to HIA. Craig further added that HIA had become a not-for-profit, grower-owned Research and Development Corporation that distributed the levy back to the industry.

Educating the NxGener's on the correct use of chemicals and fertilisers was Ashley Neuendorf from Living Turf who has worked within the industry for more than 21 years. Ashley explained the importance of mode of action, herbicide selectivity and the influences and impacts of herbicides. He also talked about the danger of over using chemicals, resulting in resistance, and causing the chemical to no longer be effective and thus making it more difficult and expensive to control weeds.

Being innovative was the underlying theme of Anne Currey, from Natural Resourceful, presentation. Anne first asked delegates what innovation meant to them, with all agreeing it was about improving and initiating change within a businesses. Anne's take-home message was that "...by not innovating because you are scared of change, cost or time, will hold your business back".

A serious topic and one on many delegates minds was that of work health and safety. Rob Noble, Engagement manager for Workplace Health & Safety QLD was on hand to suggest that the best way to guarantee staff know how to operate machinery correctly was by "...asking them to show you and have them sign off on it". Rob reminded delegates to do constant risk assessments on their workplaces. Rob's talk also touched on managing psychological issues, he opened the session up for a frank discussion where the NxGener's spoke about mental health and its effect within the workplace.

A vital message on customer service in today's fast paced business scene was enforced by Simon Adermann from Lawn Solutions Australia. Simon stressed that running a successful turf business was no longer just about growing grass. It was essential to provide customers with a service that they were willing to pay for, be positive, use open ended questions and most importantly, listen to what the customer needed. Simon also identified that the best way to handle a complaint, was by breaking the situation down, finding out what the customer was really unhappy about, and most importantly always staying calm.

A field trip to the Maroochy River Golf Course enabled the superintendent, Pat Pauli, to show-off the beautiful \$46 million golf course which opened on May 30, 2015. Pat discussed the challenges faced whilst constructing the course, such as the issue of using top soil from the lakes that had high salt content. This resulted in needing to use truckloads of lime to treat the acid sulphate soil. After years of experience constructing golf courses, Pat explained how he would like to see turf grass mowed shorter before being delivered to site for golf courses.

Inspiring 2014 future young leader, Adam Thornton shared what he had learnt from his recent trip to the Turf Producers International Conference in the United States last February. He also encouraged delegates to get involved in the programs that Turf Australia offered because there were many things to be learnt about the industry.

Another highlight was a speech from the Young Horticulturist of the Year, Chantelle Leenstra who spoke about the importance of being inspired, and never becoming stale and bored within your industry. Chantelle shared what inspired her including a six month trip to Japan. She gave her opinion on innovation, and how important it was to always be innovative. Finally, Chantelle encouraged the NxGener's to have a mentor, or even consider paying life coach.

On Tuesday the delegates visited Fullerton Farms. Third generation pineapple farmer Chris Fullerton met with the group, and explained how his farm operated. The NxGener's were given the opportunity to get look at the machinery used and even taste the pineapples. Chris also spoke about managing staff and the difficulties of being involved in a family business.

Next we travelled to GoTurf. Anthony Heilig spoke about his farm, and shared what was involved in growing his business and farm to a successful enterprise. Also at GoTurf, Suzette Argent from DAFF QLD preformed some hands on workshops, teaching the delegates about soil testing and the importance of identifying your soil type. Suzette also spoke about the dangers of water runoff especially leeching into waterways.

Finally they heard from Shane Holborn, Bioscience Australia. Shane's topic was selling turf for erosion control. Reporting on the results from his extensive research on turf being a viable and cost effective option for erosion control.

Feedback from 2015 NxGen Forum participants, sponsors and presenters have been collated (see appendix B). This feedback reflects similar feedback received following earlier NxGen forums which been provided in detail in milestone reports 105 and 103.

Given the predominantly family run, small to small/medium sized businesses within the turf industry with many having a younger generation of 18 to 40 year olds that are actively working in the farm business and intend to take full control and ownership in the future; providing tailored, turf industry based leadership development programs is imperative.

The proven NxGen Forum program developed by Turf Australia, and then partially co-funded by HIA, is considered by all stakeholder as a successful leadership development program. There is no need to move to a new model to support leadership development in the turf industry, but simply build on and continually improve this current NxGen Forum program.

The key reason for the success of the current NxGen Forum program is that it is owned, run and managed by the industry, is tailored specifically for the turf industry, is run at an appropriate time in the year, involves interesting and informative presenters and field trips, and obtains significant funding support so that the cost to delegates is minimized.



Participants from the 2013 Turf Australia NxGen Forum, Tamborine Mountain QLD.

Recommendations

The proven NxGen Forum program is considered by stakeholders as a successful leadership development program for the turf industry. The industry SIP supports a strong emphasis on extension, capacity building and industry development and given the proven success of the current NxGen Forum program, there is no need to move to a new model to support leadership development in the turf industry, but simply build on and continually improve this current NxGen Forum program.

HIA should continue and increase its funding support for an ongoing, annual NxGen Forum program run by the turf industry, for the turf industry.

References

- Turf Australia Industry Magazine, Autumn 2015, Turf Australia
- Turf Australia Industry Magazine, Winter 2015, Turf Australia
- Turf Australia Industry Magazine, Autumn 2014, Turf Australia
- Turf Australia Industry Magazine, Winter 2014, Turf Australia
- Turf Australia Industry Magazine, Summer 2013, Turf Australia
- Turf Australia Industry Magazine, Autumn 2013, Turf Australia.

Acknowledgements

Turf Australia would like to acknowledge all delegates, presenters and sponsors of the successful NxGen Forum program.

Appendices

Appendix A - 2015 NxGen Forum agenda

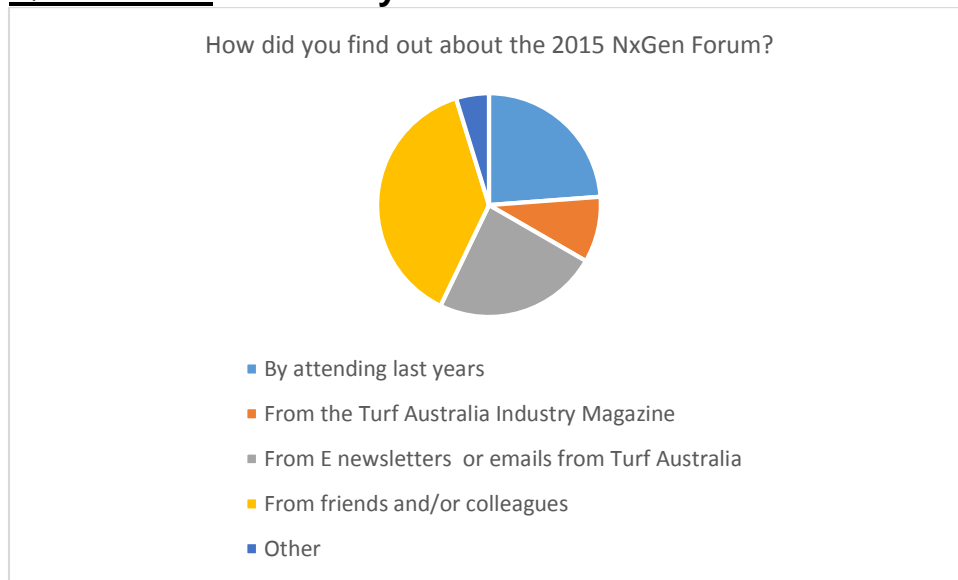
Appendix B - Participant feedback from the 2015 NxGen Forum

Appendix A – 2015 NxGen Forum Agenda

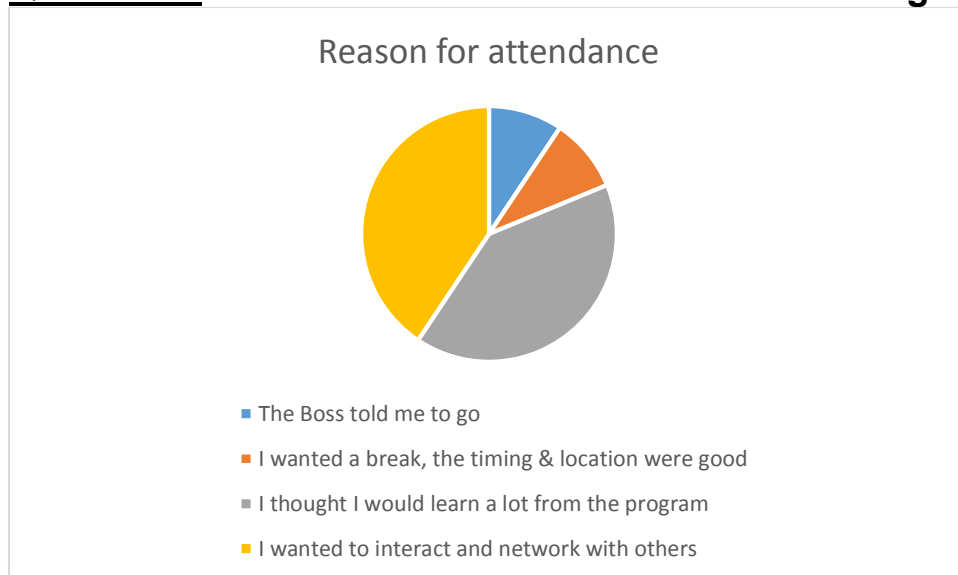
Time	Activity
Sunday 10th May	
Afternoon/evening	Arrival followed by an informal dinner
6.00pm	Adam Thornton, 2014 Future Leader <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report on his overseas study tour
Monday 11th May	
7.30 am	Breakfast
8.30 am	Craig Perring, Horticulture Innovation Australia - Understanding the Turf Levy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who is HIA Where does your levy money go? How turf growers can benefit from HIA Questions?
9.00 am	Ashley Neuendorf, Living Turf – Scientific Turf Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plant health Chemical & fertiliser absorption Questions
9.45 am	Anne Currey, Naturally Resourceful – Turf Industry Communications Review <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How should industry R&D, marketing & business information be communicated?
10.15 am	Morning Tea
10.45 am	Mr Rob Noble, Engagement Manager - Workplace Health & Safety Queensland <ul style="list-style-type: none"> OH&S practices in the workplace Positive mental health Ensuring a supportive workplace environment Questions
11.30 am	Simon Adermann, Lawn Solutions Australia - Telephone Sales Techniques <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why telephone sales techniques are important and needed in the turf industry How can we deliver telephone sales techniques training?
12.00pm	Lunch
1.00pm	Bus tour to Maroochy River Golf Club, host Pat Pauli
3.00pm	Back at Twin Waters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Segway Olympics team building
6.00pm	Pre-dinner drinks and networking
7.00pm	Chantelle Leenstra, Australian Horticulture Student of the Year 2014 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forum dinner – Being passionate about our industry
Tuesday 12th May	
7.30am	Breakfast
8.30am	Bus Tour – Fullerton Farms tour at Elimbah, host Chris Fullerton
11.00am	Travel to GoTurf - Beerburum
12.00pm	Lunch at GoTurf - host Anthony Heilig
1.00pm	Anthony Heilig - GoTurf <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How to build your business, the GoTurf story & tour
2.00pm	Suzette Argent, DAFF QLD - On farm workshops <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water runoff Leeching into waterways Soil testing
2.45pm	Shane Holborn, Bioscience Australia - On farm workshop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Erosion control
3.30pm	Depart for airport(s)

Appendix B – 2015 NxGen Participant Feedback

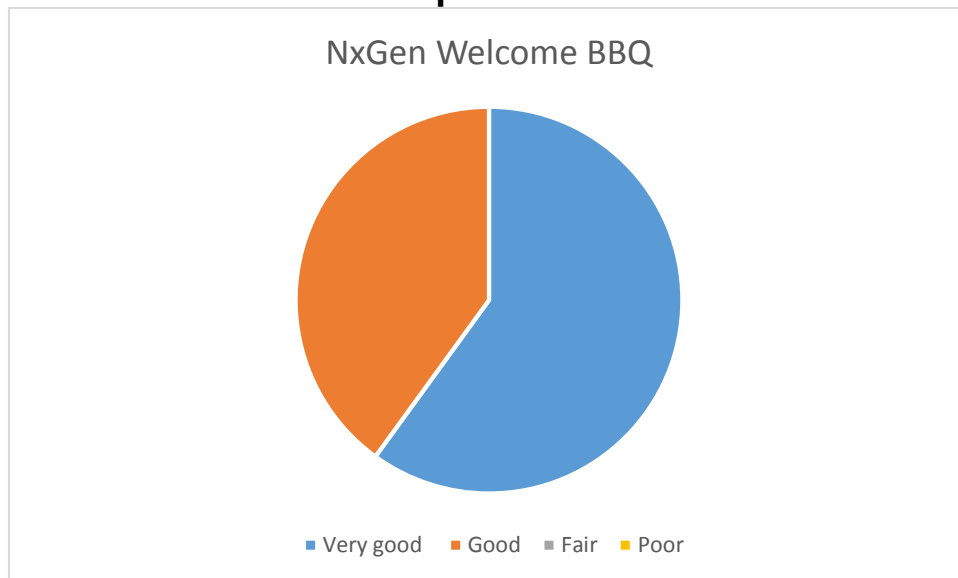
Question 1. How did you find out about the 2015 NxGen Forum?



Question 2. What was the main reason for attending this Forum?

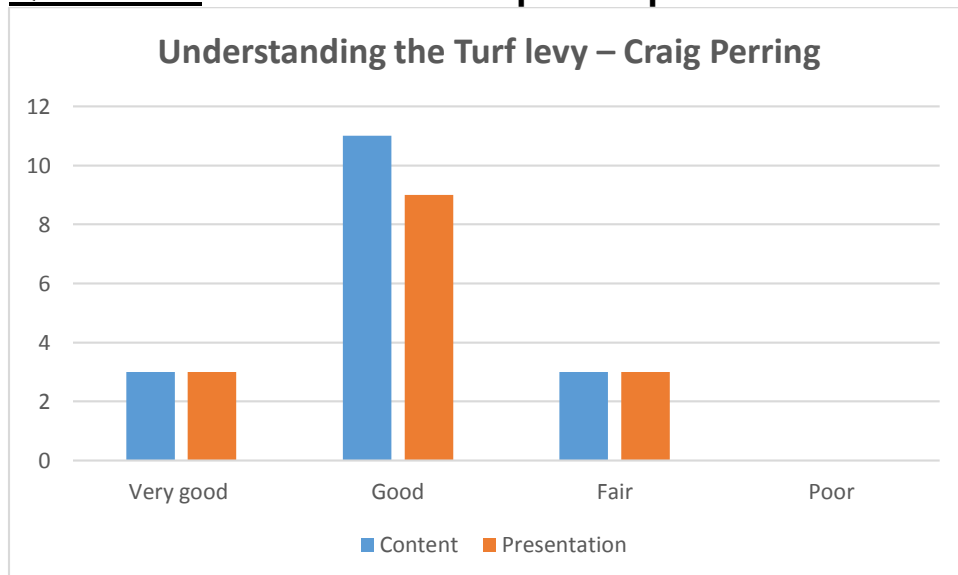


Question 3. How would you rate the welcome BBQ and Adams Thornton's report on his Future Leader Trip?

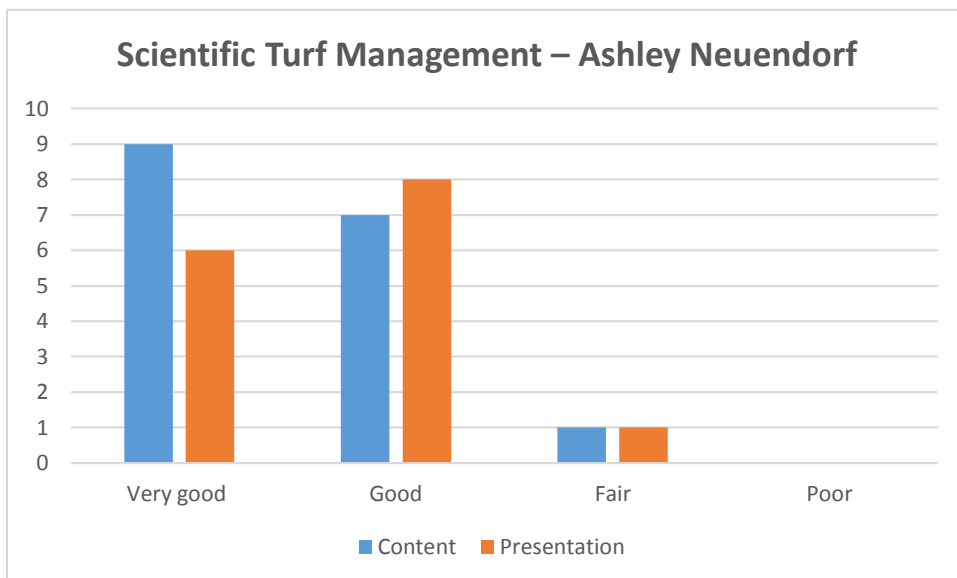


Comments: Interesting to see Adam's experiences in the USA. Very resourceful.

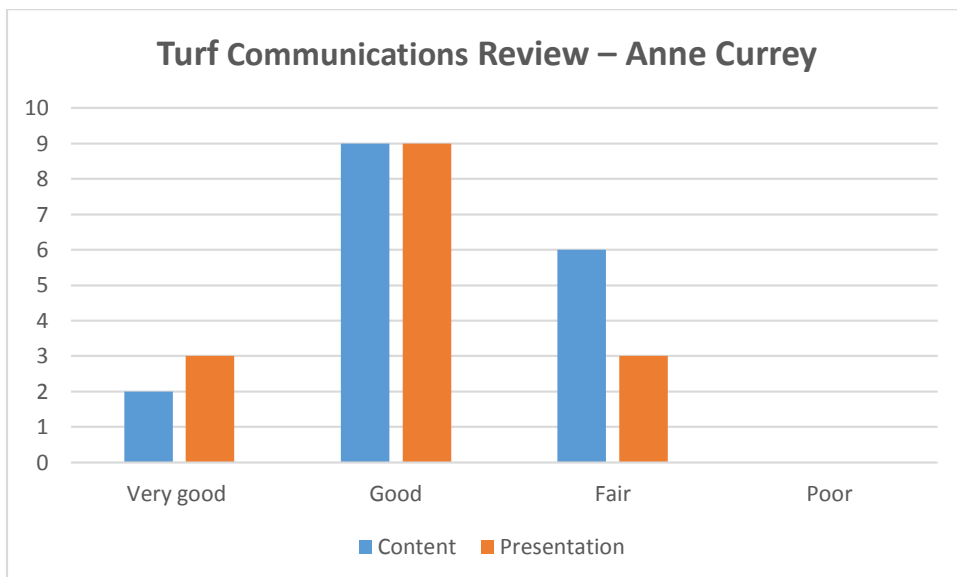
Question 4. Please rate the speaker performance and provide comments



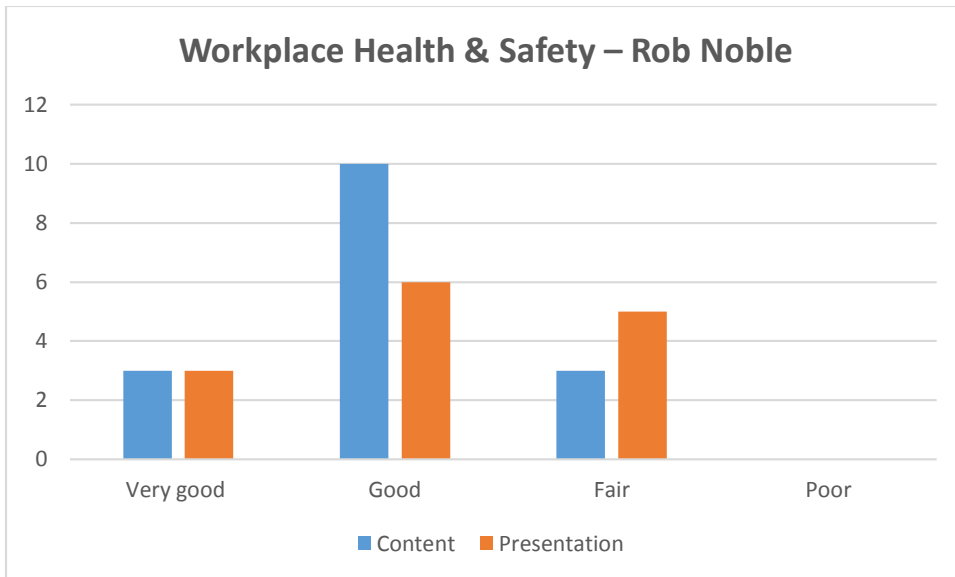
Comments: Interesting to hear about what happens to our levy funds, it would be great if we could lower the cost of collection to benefit levy payers.



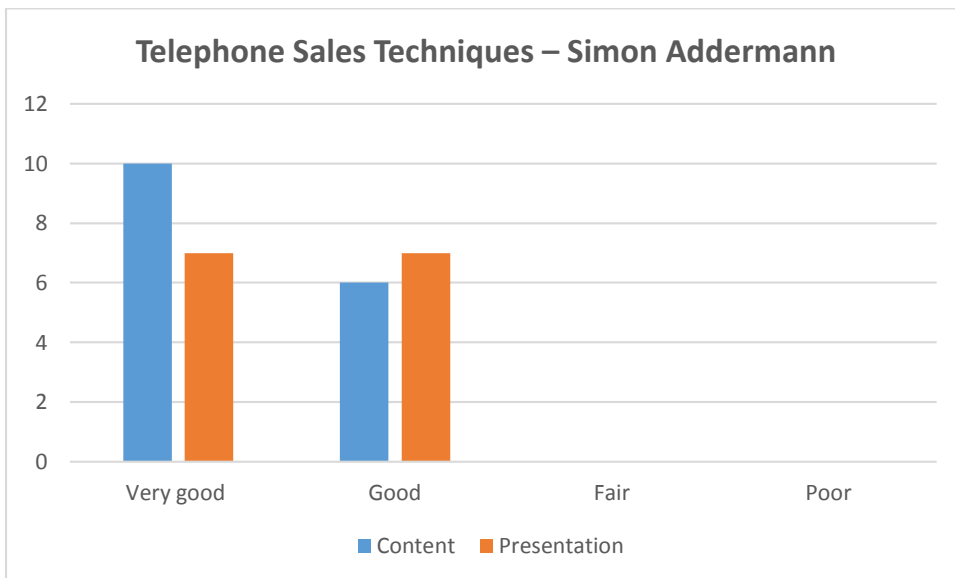
Comments: -Ashley provided a lot of relevant information such as, increasing levels of water for Nitrogen uptake. I got a lot out of Ashley's presentation. Monitor inputs on the farm.



Comments: Interesting topic. Something you don't think of in your day to day business. Innovation and brainstorming with workmates.



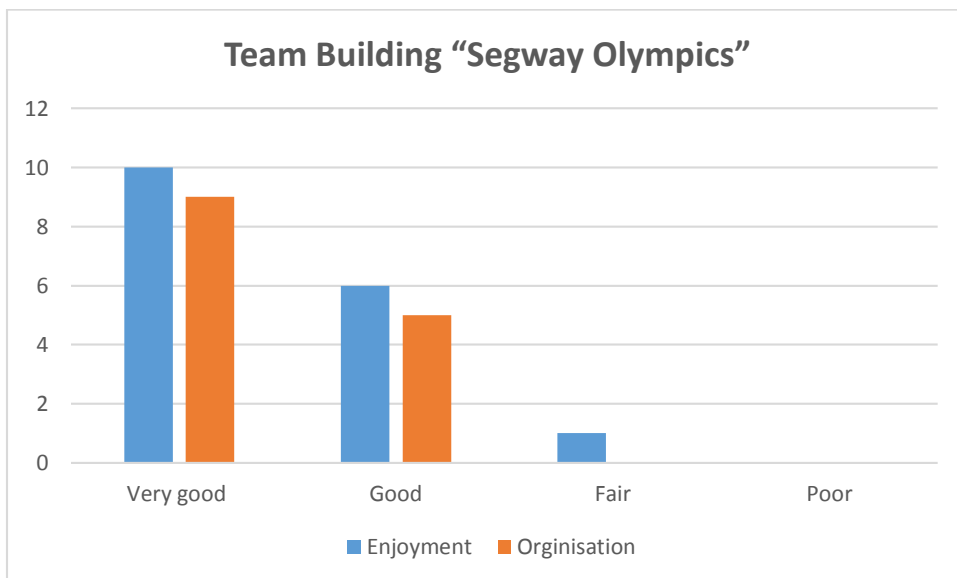
Comments: Good to receive relevant information, especially after recent incidents. WH&S talk needed more content and flow.



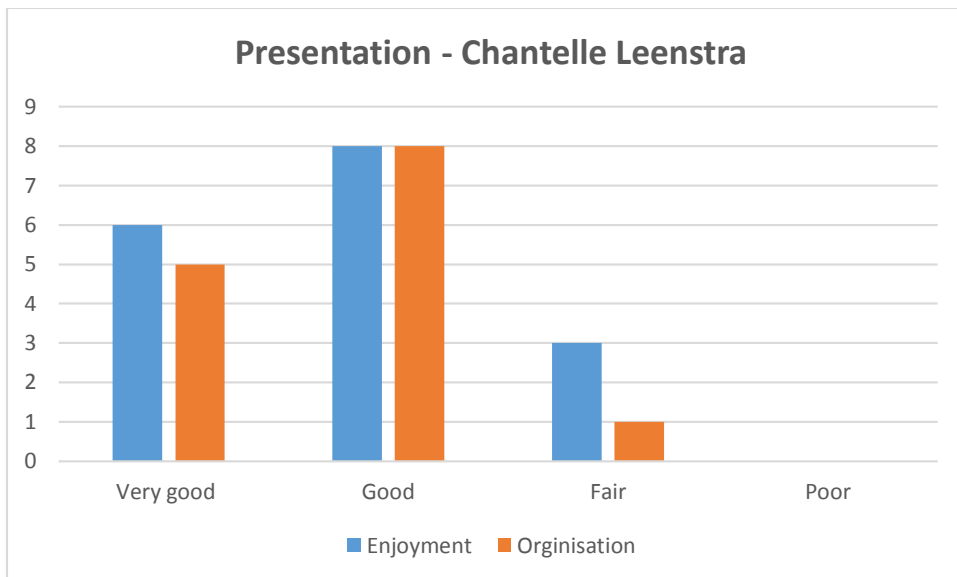
Comments: Looking forward to the telephone sales workshops once they are organised. Remember, ask, can I have your order when closing a deal. Improve customer relations, via the phone.



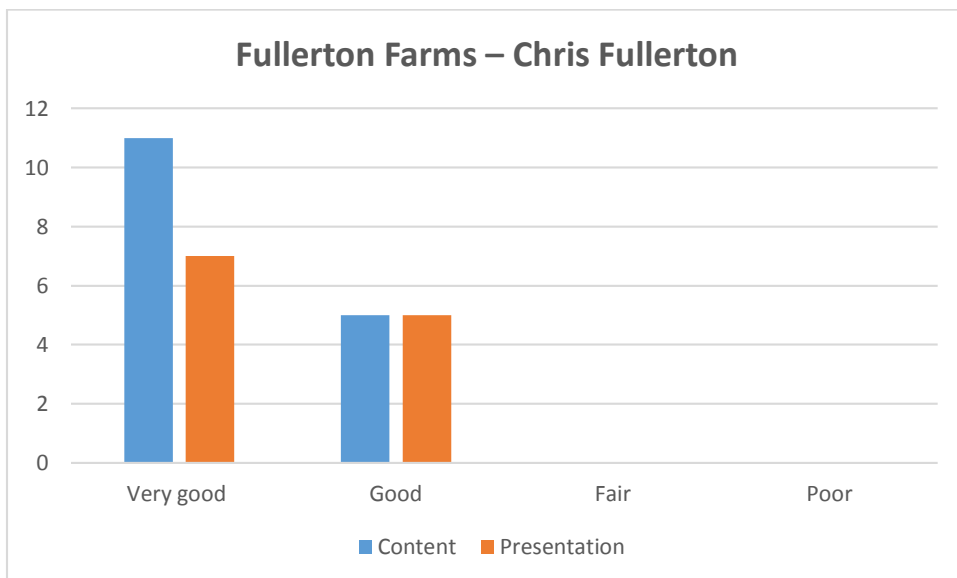
Comments: Great to see golf course and to understand their ongoing issues.



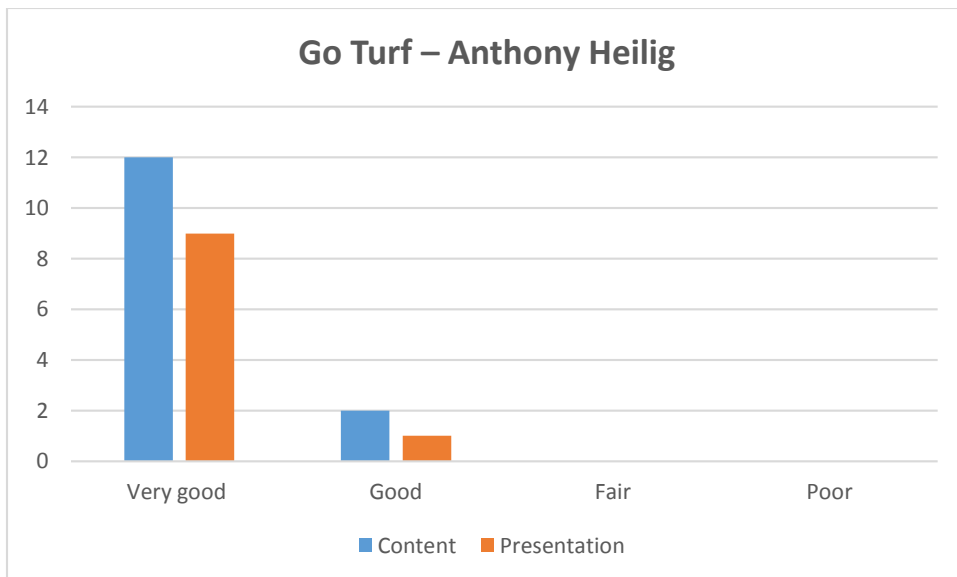
Comments: I really like the team building of Segway Olympics. Segway FANTASTIC!



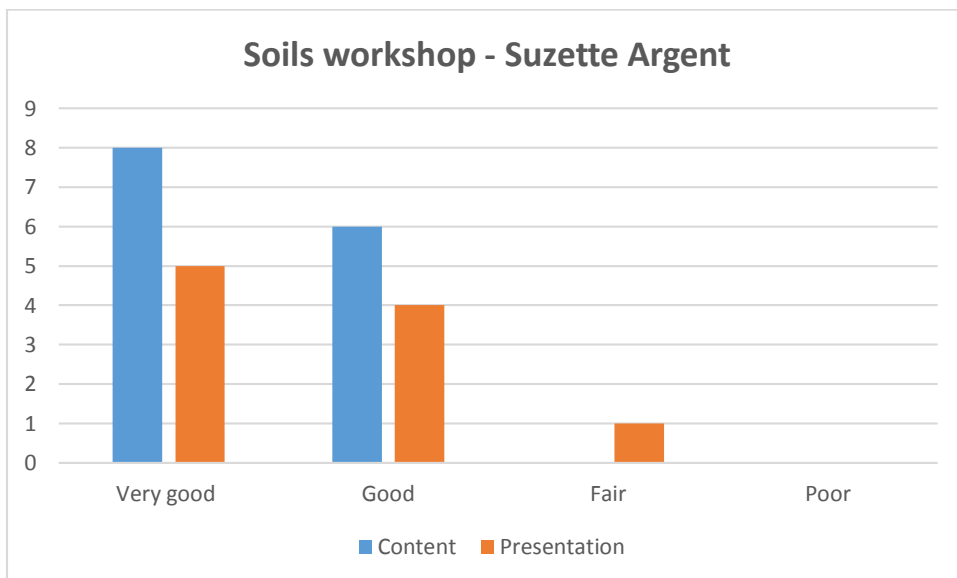
Comments: I learnt to be more innovative. Chantelle was inspiring.



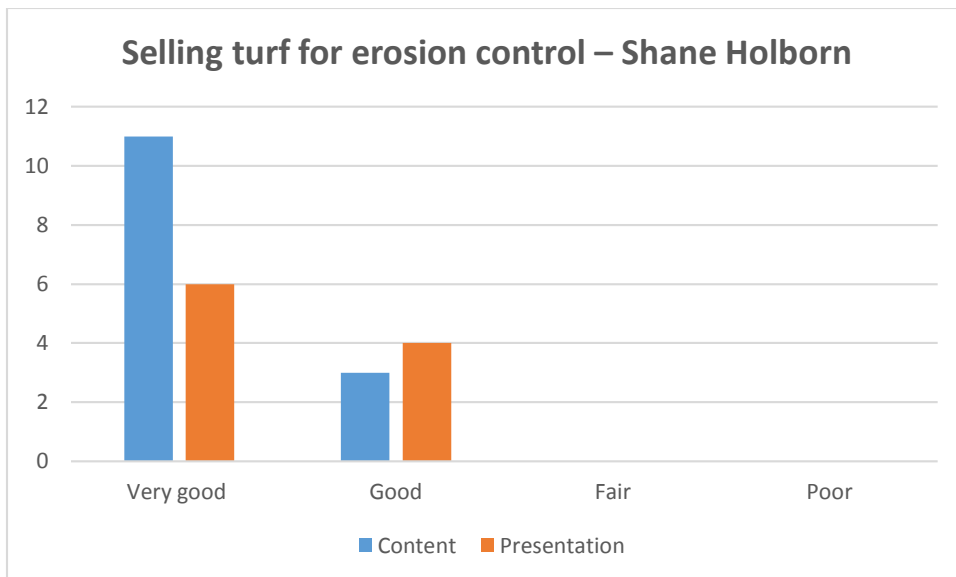
Comments: The pineapple farm was what I liked most. I learnt a bit of insight about other industries.



Comments: I enjoyed the farm tours, understanding different growers in different situations.



Comments:



Comments: I liked the erosion control talk.

The following questions were asked of the participants:

Question 7. Overall, the things you liked?

Answers: I like the fact that we were all together and now we are all mates. The talks and how they related to me and what I do. Segway teambuilding Experience. Good networking place. Fullerton Farms. Go Turf. Good forum, interesting topics, good networking. All was good and informative. Being given the opportunity to meet new people both inside and outside of the industry. Sales techniques. Erosion control talk. Networking. Scientific turf management. Telephone sales techniques. Farm tours. Meeting new people. Meeting other farmers. Information. Segway FANTASTIC!. Interaction and activities vs presentations well balanced. Informative without being boring.

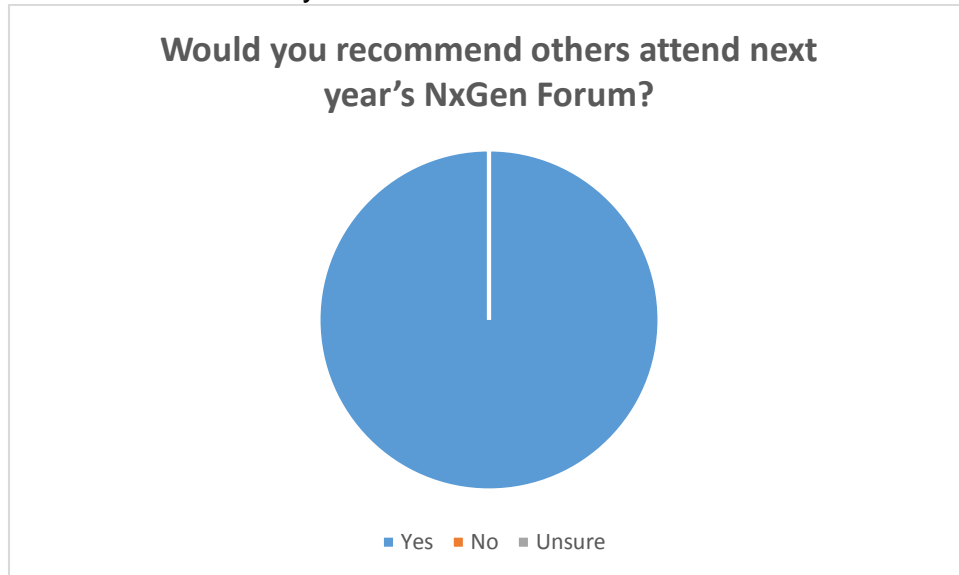
Question 8. The things that could have been improved?

Answers: Not much at all. No room sharing. Needed to provide more water on the first day, had it nailed on the second day. Not much. Nothing. Not leave on mother's day. More relevance to golf courses. Some speakers needed a microphone to be heard.

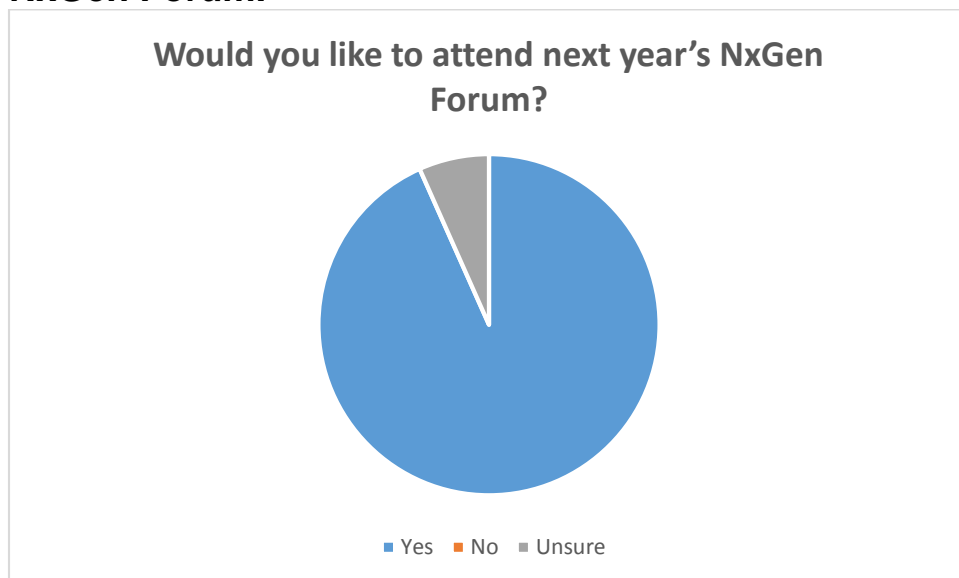
Question 9. Things you learnt and could be put into practise?

Answers: Ask, can I have your order when closing a deal. Nitrogen uptake and level of watering. To ask for an order. Simons Tips- Looking forward to the telephone sales workshops once they are organised. Continue networking. Turf management. Business skills. Better chemical and fertilizer knowledge. Sales skills. Innovation and brainstorming with workmates.

Question 10. Participants were asked if they would recommend the forum to others. 100% said yes.



Question 11. Participants were asked if they would like to attend next year's NxGen Forum.



Question 12. Participants were asked what their preferred time of year would be.

