



Bonnie mixes science and economics in agriculture

FOR BONNIE HARGREAVES, a major reason for pursuing agriculture is the chance to tackle the food shortages that are likely to emerge as the world's population increases, helping to feed people who might otherwise go hungry. "I've always barracked for the underdogs, so it sort of clicked with me," said Bonnie, who is midway through Bachelor of Agricultural Science/Bachelor of Commerce studies at the University of Western Australia.

Bonnie grew up about 150 kilometres south of Perth in the coastal town of Binningup, and had her first major exposure to agriculture through the Primary Industry Centre for Science Education (PICSE) program at the end of Year 11. "It combined all of my interests because I was doing economics at school, chemistry and other sciences."

Beginning her university studies in 2010, Bonnie was awarded a Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation Horizon Scholarship sponsored by Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL), which is exposing her to a wide variety of opportunities and experiences in the industry.

As well as participating in Horizon sessions aimed at developing her abilities as an advocate for the industry (or 'agvocate'), she has also travelled to the east coast of the country for work placements. "I've met so many people and had so many experiences. It's been phenomenal really."

Her work placements have included time spent at HAL headquarters, where she gained hands-on experience in the administrative foundations of the food production business, including documentation. She worked with the former Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation (DEEDI) in Brisbane, where researchers were developing a new pesticide for fruit flies, and also in the offices of grain bulk-handling company Emerald Group, in Perth.

These placements have consolidated her plans for a future in a plant-based industry – cropping or horticulture. In 2013 she is undertaking a science honours project focused on plant resistance to the disease Black Spot, which attacks field peas. "I'll be growing the plants and assessing them for disease, and possibly looking at the genetic markers, the genes that give the plants resistance."

In addition to the science opportunities, she also finds the business side of the industry appealing and is majoring in marketing and accounting as part of her commerce degree. "I think it's pretty important to be savvy with finance and economics, as well as the science," she said.

The sense of community has been an important part of Bonnie's experiences studying and working in agriculture. She was the only student in the first year of her agriculture science course who did not grow up on a farm, but her classmates were supportive, taking her to their homes and "showing her the ropes".

The Horizon Scholarship has also helped Bonnie build industry networks, as has her involvement in the ABC's Heywire project, which invites young people from regional areas to submit a story about their community in text, audio or video. Bonnie's submission was judged as one of the top 40 in 2009, and she was selected to participate in a youth summit in Canberra to brainstorm solutions to the challenges for young people in regional Australia. She said it was an amazing experience to debate ideas, work with the ABC and industry mentors, meet politicians and develop leadership skills. ●

The Horizon Scholarship is open to students entering their first year of university and studying a degree related to agriculture, such as agricultural science, rural science, livestock/animal science, veterinary science or agribusiness.

Applications close on 1 February 2013 and scholarship recipients are announced in late March 2013. Application forms can be downloaded from the RIRDC website – or by contacting RIRDC on 02 6271 4100.

Sponsors of the Horizon Scholarship are Woolworths, Quality Silage Systems, the Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Australian Egg Corporation, Australian Pork Limited, the Cotton Research and Development Corporation, the Grains Research and Development Corporation, the Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation, Horticulture Australia Limited, Meat and Livestock Australia, the Sugar Research and Development Corporation and the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation.

