So you want to be an agricultural/ horticultural journalist?
(written for students/ young people)

"One of the agricultural industries greatest assets is its journalists" said Dr Pearse Lyons, the president of Alltech, a research based animal nutrition company.

And so once again this April, 11 enthusiastic, potential journalists attended the Guild of Agricultural Journalists and John Deere Training Award.

For those with little or no experience in journalism, who are looking towards this career, the annual 1-week training course is an excellent opportunity to learn from the industries best.

Compromising of 2-days practical seminars at the John Deere headquarters followed by 3-days practical work experience with specialist newspapers, magazines and PR groups, the course aims to give an insight into the career path and encourage suitable entrants into agricultural and horticultural journalism.

The course commenced with David Mascord, a freelance editorial training consultant educating the group on different styles of journalism including news writing, feature writing and interviewing. Joe Watson, the Guild's chairman was present throughout the day offering advice towards practical exercises that were undertaken.

The second day consisted of Charles Abel, the technical editor of the Farmers Weekly discussed with the group his experiences in journalism, providing more practical activities and answering any questions that were raised. Martyn Cox then spoke on his

knowledge of freelance writing for horticultural magazines and papers. Head of Communications for the Milk Development Council, Amy Jackson informed everyone on the possibilities of working in public relations.

The 2-days ended traditionally with the “ride and drive” session, where the applicants were let loose on various John Deere equipment before departing to their 3-day placement.

Once the course is completed each applicant must submit a written report on a pre chosen topic, which is then judged and prizes awarded at the Guild’s awards presentation in July.

If you want an example of how the Guild’s course has helped people pick up a career in agricultural/ horticultural journalism then look no further. Liz Falkingham, editor of the Farmers Guardian and a dairy farmer’s daughter attended the training course just over 12-years ago. With a degree in Agriculture and Animal Science, the Guild’s training award and plenty of enthusiasm behind her, Liz secured a job with the Farmers Guardian and has been there ever since. Speaking about the award, Liz feels that the work experience is a brilliant opportunity to get your foot in the door, providing the ability to make contacts and learn from leading journalists.

Last years award winner, Sally Charrett completed her 3-day work experience with The Garden magazine journal offering her the opportunity to apply for the annual traineeship placement, which in turn gave her the job she has now as Editorial Projects Manager.

Liz and Sally have no qualifications in journalism except the Guild's training award. When asked how important was it for young people entering the industry their advice was to show interest and determination as well as a willingness to work hard. Put yourself forward for jobs and get as much work experience as possible, qualifications are less important in this job.

So if you have an inquisitive nature, the ability to communicate with different types of people, a flare for writing and the passion for agriculture or horticulture then consider a career in journalism. Be at the centre of your industry, the front of all research and have the ability to communicate the findings – what could be more rewarding?

For further details on the Guild's annual training course, please contact Steve Mitchell of ASM Public Relations Ltd on 024 7630 8912 or email him at Steve@asmpr.co.uk

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