



**Rabobank**

*Media release  
February 24, 2014*

## ***Leading farm business management program calls for 2014 applications***

Applications for this year's Rabobank's prestigious **Executive Development Program** are officially open. The program – which gives leading farmers from across Australia and New Zealand the opportunity to enhance their business management skills and take their enterprises forward – is open for applications for its 2014 course, commencing in August.

Announcing the opening of applications for the 2014 program, acting CEO Rabobank Australia Peter Knoblanche said farm management had evolved to become much more commercially focused than in the past, making it necessary for producers to think more strategically about how they run their operations.

"Today, farmers are becoming more commercial in their business management – primary producers have to think more strategically, manage many risks and develop their people skills and capability – and a big part of that evolution is investing in themselves in order to benefit their business," Mr Knoblanche said.

"The core of the Executive Development Program is to focus on the commercial and strategic factors that farmers face today. They're getting bigger, more commercial, business-focused, with more employees working for them than ever before."

The program, run in two separate modules over the course of one full year introduces participants to the latest practices in business management, leadership, strategy, finance, human resources, value chain management and marketing, and how these can be directly applied to their farm businesses.

"The reality is running an agricultural enterprise is extremely complex, no matter the sector. We need to recognise that across the agricultural industry," Mr Knoblanche said.

"We will continue to invest in the knowledge of our clients – a vital component of business success – and provide them with access to the latest management tools to assist in making informed business decisions."

North-east Victorian beef producer Rod Manning completed the Executive Development Program in 2013, as he has been transitioning into the lead management role for the business, taking on more responsibility for the direction of the farm.

Rod manages an 1,800 hectare family enterprise 'Davitlak' in Mansfield which runs 1,400 commercial Angus cattle as part of an intensive grazing pasture-based system. On completion of the Executive Development Program, Rod said one of the main goals he set for the business was implementing a structured approach to roles and responsibilities for on-farm operations.

With a focus on expanding the farm enterprise, Rod wants to "keep the momentum going", implementing the lessons of the Rabobank program.



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“We are really in ‘expansion mode’ at the moment – I think we’re pretty good at what we’re doing but there is always room to fine-tune your operation,” Rod said.

“One of our main goals is around benchmarking. It’s something we have done before but not for almost eight years, so it’s time to review. We are sitting down with a group of other local producers, discussing our business, and benchmarking collectively so we can keep our businesses progressing in all aspects.

“We get together to hone in on the ‘the sweet spots’ as well as looking at where the leakages are in our businesses – mostly from a financial perspective. Then we can look at how to tighten any loose screws, improving things in stages.”

For the most part, Rod said the farm has been a family-run business and “fairly fluid” but now, he is keen to see more structure and have a clearer picture of responsibilities for our operations.

“We are also getting a budget going which others have input into, so we will have more structure when it comes to our financial planning,” he said.

With his sister Kate retuning home and his father stepping back from the day-to-day operational duties, Rod said it has been important to engineer a management structure so the family are able to be across the overall strategy of the business.

“We needed to formalise our structure so people know where their responsibilities are and what they’re accountable for. We wanted to involve other family members in the goal setting process because it’s good to keep everyone abreast of what we’re doing. The Rabobank program really articulated how important this is when you’re managing staff and relationships on-farm,” he said.

“This will eventually lead into our succession plan, and potentially save us time in how we implement that change by involving everyone through communication. We want to get the cogs turning now so we’re in a better place to address the change in management in the future.”

Overall, Rod said one of the main take-away’s from the Executive Development Program has been the need to address succession planning as early as possible.

“The succession topics covered in the program were some of the most valuable lessons and as a result, it has got us thinking so we’re heading in the right direction with the process,” he said.

“We are looking into how we want to address our succession and we’re exploring how to start having meetings, with some independent support and strategy.”

Applications for Rabobank’s 2014 Executive Development Program are open until Friday 30 May 2014, with applicants accepted from across a range of commodities and



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geographical locations in Australia and New Zealand. Held in Sydney, the first module runs from 17 to 22 August 2014, with the second module taking place in July of next year.

Producers interested in an application form or any further information on the Rabobank Executive Development Program should visit [www.rabobank.com.au/bmp](http://www.rabobank.com.au/bmp) or contact Rabobank Business Programs manager Nerida Sweetapple on 02 8115 4139 or email [bmp@rabobank.com](mailto:bmp@rabobank.com).

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