

# Students support earthquake affected farmers in China

Chinese peasant farmers in a remote mountain village devastated by a major earthquake on May 2008 have welcomed a group of Australian Agribusiness students from Marcus Oldham College in Geelong with open arms.

The 2009 Diploma of Agribusiness students and their college joined forces to provide a significant donation to assist the farmers in Yangping village who were displaced by the effects of the devastating 2008 earthquake which measured 8.9 on the Richter scale.

Almost 70,000 people died and thousands more left homeless, making the quake one of the worst natural disasters in recent history.

Yangping village, in Sichuan province in south west China, was just 30 km from the earthquake's epicenter and bore the full brunt of the disaster.

The Marcus Oldham students' visit on September 10 was coordinated by Heifer International, a non-profit charity established by a group of Minnesota farmers in the US which is dedicated to supporting peasant farming families worldwide.

"We were overwhelmed by the hospitality we received from the villagers, who had turned out in their finest to welcome us. They even had a huge banner for us at the

village entrance," Marcus Oldham Senior lecturer Des Umbers said.

"We were all very moved by the scenes of devastation and the courage and pride of those who had survived and rebuilt villages that had been reduced to rubble, while also dealing with isolation due to damaged bridges and roads.

"Many farmers were forced to sell or eat their stock in the weeks following the earthquake, merely to survive," Des said.

During their visit the students walked into the mountains to witness the work of Heifer International which had supplied money so 51 farmers could purchase and feed one cow each.

The support was given under the proviso that each cow's progeny be given to another farmer and it is anticipated that within two years, more than 100 farmers will benefit from the initial purchase of cows.

Des said one of the most tragic aspects of the earthquake was the high proportion of school children killed in the disaster, which occurred just 10 minutes before the start of classes for the day.

## Australian exports

The visit to Yangping village was the final stop in a 12 day tour of China for the agribusiness students who were investigat-

ing the potential for Australian exports in the region.

The group visited Hong Kong, Macau, and various Chinese towns finishing in Chengdu. It included visits to a number of farms, processors and businesses as well as the Duyang irrigation project – built over 2000 years ago and still providing irrigation for farms, as well as town water for factories.

They also met with a number of Australians who were working in the Chinese market.

Jess Harris of Adelaide Cellar Door stressed the importance of developing good Guanxi, or 'networking' and good relationships with business partners. Jess is based in Hong Kong and works with parents, David and Jane and Hugh MacGillivray. David and Hugh are both past students of Marcus Oldham College.

Tasmanian Ben Quin lives in Zhongshan, just across the border from Macau and talked about his experiences and the importance of having good local staff.

Well educated staff had helped Ben enter new markets because they "knew someone locally" who was able to introduce Ben to key contacts in the area.

Ben led the group on a visit to a wind turbine plant, which was an ISO accredited, world class factory producing turbines for world markets.

## Amazing opportunities

"There was a common theme to all our visits – there are amazing opportunities in China, but you need to be sensitive to the Chinese business culture, and have good Chinese people working for you on the ground in China," Des said.

"As incomes rise, Chinese people will be able to afford quality produce and Australian produce will have a ready market.

"We may not be able to compete with the cheap bulk food commodities coming out of other Asian countries, but we can certainly provide quality products to the emerging Asian middle classes that are seeking a healthier lifestyle.

**The study tour is an integral part of the Diploma of Agribusiness, the first year program of the Bachelor of Business (Agribusiness) at Marcus Oldham. The students are from across Australia and New Zealand. This was the sixth year of the Agribusiness China tour.** ■



Agribusiness students from Marcus Oldham College meet with the Yangping villagers.