

The long journey from the farm gate of “Trio Angus” on the Liverpool Plains to Michigan State University in the USA certainly has been exciting so far!

Myself and the University of Illinois scholarship winner, Matt Cherry, arrived in Iowa for the National Junior Angus Show in mid-July. This was certainly a great way to start the trip! The show was huge with 1200 head being exhibited, the presentation of the stock was remarkable but it was the time and money that had been put into preparing and feeding these animals that really amazed us!

My next stop was to Hartman Cattle Company in Nebraska. This was a Maine Anjou operation that holds a prestigious customer appreciation sale every year. Here I helped break in and start preparing the cattle for the sale, all of which was done in an air-conditioned barn to get their hair growing. Then it was off to Canada, to Eastern Breeders Inc. in Ontario. This is a semen collection facility that houses around 350 beef and dairy bulls. Here I got to learn about the whole semen collection process including laboratory and testing procedures. Another interesting aspect was that several of the Fresian bulls being collected were clones. Whilst at EBI I also got a chance to see several Angus bulls including Connealy Easy.

From here I met up with Jim Bruce and other Semex representatives from Canada, Brazil and the US for the Semex Tour. The tour was based in Canada and was a week filled with a lot of driving, a lot of cattle and definitely a lot of laughs! We travelled through Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta looking at several Angus herds as well as other breeds. A highlight was visiting Mountain View Farms and looking at their females as well as seeing MVF VRD Dateline. Visiting Remington Cattle Co. was another highlight as we got to see the calves from the International Embryo Program. Embryos had been bought from several countries including Brazil, Scotland, Uruguay, the US and Australia and the calves were being raised to show the differences in the Angus breed at the World Angus Forum in Calgary next year. Other places we visited included Benchmark Angus, Remitall Cattle Co. and Alta Genetics. A big thankyou must go to Semex and Jim Bruce for giving me the chance to be a part of this tour.

Since the end of August I have been at MSU taking classes in Endocrinology of Reproduction, Animal Nutrition, Animal & Product Evaluation and Advanced Feedlot Management. The classes all have a very practical focus and I have been using some of the great facilities they have here at MSU. In Feedlot Management we spend time at the university feedlot which holds around 800 head and also do regular field trips to other feedlots in the area. Animal & Product Evaluation has also been very useful as we get to assess cattle, sheep and pigs live and then the next week we judge the same animals on the hook. I have found this very valuable as its something you don't often get the chance to do. Whilst at MSU I've also had a visit from Bob Dent which was a great surprise!

Recently myself and Matt have also been to Oklahoma to be a part of the National Angus Conference and Tour. This was very worthwhile and it gave us an insight into the current issues facing the US beef industry. We also got to travel around the state visiting different Angus operations including Limestone, Express Ranches and Oklahoma State University. In addition we had a short stay in Montana where we went to the Sitz Angus sale and visited ORigen Genetic Services. Here we got to see several Angus bulls including Sitz New Design 458N & Three Trees Prime Cut. Whilst in Montana we also visited Yellowstone National Park and went to our first US rodeo.

Overall this is certainly an interesting time to be visiting the US! Between the current economic problems, the election campaigns and not to mention the Curly Calf Syndrome there is definitely a lot happening! Through my travels so far around the US it is clear that their beef industry is facing many of the same challenges as we are in Australia. Rising input costs are a key problem and US beef producers are also facing a range of issues associated with competition for corn. Other current issues in the US beef industry include the introduction of Mandatory Country Of Origin Labelling and conflict regarding the need for a national form of livestock identification.

So far my time over here has been unbelievable and I would like to acknowledge and thank Semex, Angus Australia and the Australian Beef Industry Foundation for sponsoring this scholarship. I would also like to say a huge thankyou to my parents, Sam and Meg Piper, without their support this trip wouldn't have been possible. The knowledge and experience this scholarship has to offer young people in the beef industry is invaluable and I strongly encourage people to apply in the future.