

"The Experience of a Lifetime!"

How time flies! It only seems like last week that I set off for the United States to undertake the Michigan State University scholarship. To begin my experience in the US I flew in early August into Nashville Tennessee, for an Applied Strategies in Beef Cattle Reproduction conference. This was a three day conference run by the Beef Cattle Reproductive Taskforce, guest presenters from different universities and beef extension groups discussed different management issues that are presently faced in beef cattle reproduction and the importance of these. At the same time the LEAD Angus conference was also being run in Nashville so i was able to attend this for the final day. This is a junior run leadership initiative for the youth, which moves around the country each year and is very well supported.

Semex did not conduct a breeder's tour for the summer of 2010, so I did some touring of my own through a few states. Despite record high temperatures, I managed to tour a variety of operations and meet some great people; these included Deer Valley, Ed Durst, TC Ranch, Heartland Cattle Company, Wagonhammer ranches, Sandpoint Angus sale where a ½ interest in a GAR Predestined daughter brought \$70,000, Fox Run Farms and Sydenstrickers Genetics. I also made it to Circle A Feeders, here 3000 head of Circle A bred cattle are fed in a barn that is 250 feet wide by ½ a mile long (the biggest shed i have ever set eyes on), Hawkeye breeders and finally one of Trans Ova's reproductive facilities. On return to Kansas City I had the opportunity to tour through the American Angus Headquarters which was really neat as well.

Iowa State fair proved to be quite the eye opener. Considered one of the largest State fairs in the US I was able to take in Angus Judging and also view the steers that were to be shown later in the week. The champion steer ended up actually being a clone, which was astonishing. Something else that staggered me was the ability of the American to deep fry and sell anything from pork chops on a stick to a snickers bar. My final week before I started school was spent at Express Ranches in Oklahoma, giving them a hand for their big event sale where 750 head were presented for sale over the two days. Having worked for them before it was super to be able to catch up and spend some time with some old friends.

Michigan State University is a campus of an incredible scale that contains a huge amount of history and prestige. There were approximately 47,000 students studying on the very picturesque campus from across the globe. MSU has very strong Agricultural roots and has a number of farming operations included on the campus including a Purebred Angus and Hereford herd of cattle, an undercover feedlot, a dairy, sheep flock, piggery and horse stud that are all used for research and to aid in the daily learning of the students.

My studies involved Endocrinology of Reproduction, Product Evaluation and Advanced Feedlot Management. These subjects were all very practical allowing the chance to go on field trips regularly; touring facilities such as feedlots, and a JBS packing plant which I thoroughly enjoyed, AFM also had regular highly regarded industry speakers, such as Mark McCully from Certified Angus Beef. Product evaluation allowed the opportunity to evaluate Beef, Sheep and Swine both in a live form and then later in the week their carcasses, this I found to be most interesting as it gave an insight into the US meat grading system focusing on quality and yield grading and then pricing of carcasses. The reproductive subject increased my understanding of hormones in breeding systems across a number of species and was a very interesting subject as well.

While at MSU I also spent time with the Livestock Judging team and was employed at the Purebred beef barn. Attending the largest Purebred Livestock show in the world in Louisville, Kentucky and also the American Royal in Kansas with stock from the beef barn where at both shows MSU did extremely well. The purebred barn also conducted a sale for each breed which were both very successful. I joined the Block and Bridle club which is a livestock based group of students that get together regularly to undertake different informative and social activities, MSU hosted the national convention during my semester providing the opportunity to meet many fellow young people with similar interests from right across the country and develop some great friendships.

For the semester at MSU my residence was in the Alpha Gamma Rho (AGR) fraternity house. This consisted of 50 members all living in the house with the majority from strong farming backgrounds. Lots of stories, laughs and information were shared back and forth between all of us and I am very appreciative of the way these guys helped make my stay as worthwhile and enjoyable as possible. I had a great time with the boys of AGR attending many football games to watch the MSU Spartans, MSU Basketball, a major league baseball game and taking part in other cultural activities within Michigan and the University. Part way through the semester I had the chance to show Peter Parnell the house, campus and facilities and introduce him to some of the staff as he stopped by on his trip of the US.

Nearing the completion of my time at Michigan State I attended the National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas and also went to an Angus sale that was held at the Bellagio Casino, by far the most outrageous sale I have ever attended with Cuban cigars and Liquor being handed out by Rio girls and waiters, no cattle or video present and an average most would only dream of. As winter set in I headed to Texas to spend Christmas with a close friend and his family who are involved with Brahman cattle. It was a great chance to catch up and thaw out, before spending the last week of December in Iowa in the blistering cold at Solution Genetics Red Angus whom I attended part of the National Western with in Denver to conclude my trip.

In closing I would likely to sincerely thank Semex and Angus Australia for continuing to support this scholarship. My thanks also to Dr Dave Hawkins, Dan Buskirk, Ashley Bushman, Cody Sankey and the

many other wonderful people in the US who were so welcoming and made my stay so fantastic. The Michigan State University scholarship is a very unique and worthwhile experience that provides so many benefits to the recipient. Having returned to Australia now my knowledge of US agriculture, and the American culture has been greatly enhanced. I have had the chance to meet and speak with beef industry leaders and have developed a great network of contacts and friends

I would strongly encourage anybody who has a desire to succeed in the Beef Industry to apply for this once in a lifetime incredible opportunity. I cannot praise the scholarship and its value enough and the opportunities it has created for me!

Tom Wilding-Davies – 2010 Michigan State University Winner.



MSU Clock Tower mid campus early December



Tom standing with the Michigan Sate Spartan



Michigan State University Purebred Beef Barn unit