

## NEW ZEALAND EXCHANGE REPORT

As the recipient of the 2008 Angus Youth New Zealand Exchange I would like to thank Angus Australia for their sponsorship of the Trans-Tasman exchange. Without their generous support, my trip in 2008 to New Zealand would not have been possible. I would also like to thank Kaylene Bradley of New Zealand Angus for organising all the hosts during my visit. I gained a lot of knowledge on my trip and hope to adapt some of the things I learnt from my experience and apply them in Australia. I would also like to encourage other young people enthusiastic about the beef industry to consider applying for this opportunity as it was a great experience and really broadens your horizons of a future in agriculture.

I embarked on my journey at the end of November. Travelling across the Tasman later in the year meant I missed all the New Zealand bull sales but it gave me a prime opportunity to view the genetic nucleus of each herd I visited. All the operations I visited calve once a year in spring so I landed right in the middle of breeding season. This gave me a really good insight into the direction of where each stud was heading with their program as I got to see cows out in joining mobs with young calves at foot. I was able to observe the choice of sires that were being used over different types of females. I also saw the select group of heifers they had chosen to keep as future breeders. The bull sale drafts for 2009 were all yearlings so I was able to appreciate these young bulls as the real deal before they received any sale preparation.



Atahua Angus - Bull in joining mob of cows & calves

I spent a total of four weeks in New Zealand and was hosted by seven different Angus studs. I began my trip in the South Island spending time at Kowai Angus; Braxton Angus & Herefords; Delmont Angus & Charolais; Goldwyn Angus; and Floridale Angus. I then travelled to the North Island for the final week of my trip visiting Merchiston Angus and Atahua Angus. Spreading my trip over the two islands allowed me to better appreciate the New Zealand beef industry and how it has adapted to suit various regions.



Merchiston Angus

Richard Rowe giving Jasmine Nixon some tips on dagging lambs

My first impression of New Zealand was amazement with what you can do with grass, when it actually rains. The weight gains they were achieving on pasture, with no supplementation were impressive. I found the New Zealand beef industry had quite different markets compared to Australia. Most of their production is based on grass-fed beef. Most cattle are finished on grass at 18-22 months old. New Zealand beef is using its natural production systems to help promote their product as clean and green on the global market. There is only one feedlot in the whole country, 5-Star at Ashburton in the South Island which has a 15,000 head capacity.

The steep landscape and harsh winters are a real contrast to most Australian beef systems. Good conformation of stock is vital on the hills so it is plain to observe why they consider it so important in their selection process. Cows are supplementary fed stored forage such as baleage and silage in winter due to the lack of pasture growth. Since winter conditions make feeding stock difficult, some of the operations have developed self-fed silage pads. Cows are given ad lib access to the pad. A hot wire is set at a certain height to control access to the open silage face. This system allows much easier management of cows through the winter months.

Another major difference I discovered is the impact of the dairy industry on beef operations. The exponential expansion of the New Zealand dairy industry has had a mixed impact on the New Zealand beef industry. A third of beef bull sales come from the trade of predominantly yearling bulls as terminal sires for use over dairy females. Competition for land has increased as the country traditionally used for sheep and beef cattle is being reanalysed for potential dairy conversions. The New Zealand beef cow herd numbers have decreased with more operations switching to dairy or growing Friesian bull-beef.

Several breeders have recognised a need for more emphasis on fertility in the New Zealand industry. There are suggestions to make more calving season data available on all registered New Zealand Angus females. A few of the operations I visited have taken this even further and are conducting semen morphology and quality tests on their entire sale drafts. This involves not only testing semen on-farm but samples are also sent away to determine the overall quality of each individual. Only bulls that are greater than 70% normal are included in the sale draft. These scores are included in the sale catalogue and a review of clients shows they are using this information in their bull selection. Several clients have since commented that they are getting more cows in calf in the first cycle. This has not only tightened up their calving period but also created a more uniform, marketable calf drop.

As well as trying to maximise performance through genetic selection, many breeders are lifting production through their management of pasture growth. Since most of New Zealand beef production is grass based, downtime for pasture improvements can be an issue. To combat this, some producers are using the New Zealand developed 'Cross-Slot No Tillage' system. It incorporates the Baker Boot opener and creates a horizontal shelf onto which the seed and fertilizer are directly delivered. The unique shape of the slot prevents seed burn but maximises strike rate. As well as maintaining organic matter and ground cover the ultimate benefit of the Cross-Slot system was the rapid turnaround. This is much faster than most conventional cultivation programs and allows the pasture to be utilised sooner by stock.



Delmont Angus – Yearling Heifers

I also visited the New Zealand Angus Bull Evaluation Unit at Palmerston North. This concept aims to run bulls representing different studs within the same management group from yearlings onto rising two-year olds. It provides an opportunity for breeders to benchmark their genetics against other studs. Weight gains are closely monitored and the group is routinely culled on poor structure, temperament or performance. The final group is sold at auction at the National Show and Sale.

The New Zealand trip gave me a wonderful opportunity to appreciate the New Zealand beef industry and its importance in agriculture and also begin to understand where New Zealand and Australia fit in terms of the global beef marketplace. I met lots of great people who were extremely generous in sharing their knowledge and showcasing their cattle and country.

I would like to personally thank: Kaylene Bradley of New Zealand Angus; Dougal, Gaye and Joe Stringer of Kowai Angus; Dave, Erin and Laurie Bradley of Braxton Angus & Herefords; John, Tracey, Rebecca and Jono Cochrane of Delmont Angus & Charolais; Bruce and Barbara Alexander of Goldwyn Angus; Jane Jenkins and family of Floridale Angus; Richard, Vicky and Will Rowe of Merchiston Angus; Alan, Michelle, Bec and Kirsten Dalziell of Atahua Angus; and Nat Marshall and family of Benatrade Angus.



Atahua Angus – Jasmine Nixon & Kirsten Dalziell

I would like to extend a huge thank you for their kindness and generosity in their support of the youth beef movement. I would like to encourage all Angus Youth members to consider applying for this scholarship as it is an amazing opportunity. It allows you to not only learn from the systems within another country but gives you a broader perspective in viewing our own production systems.

Jasmine Nixon  
2008 Angus Youth New Zealand Exchange recipient