

FUTURE FARMERS NETWORK- Intercollegiate Meat Judging Competition and Tour in the United States, January-February 2018.

Last July I competed in the Australian Intercollegiate Meat Judging Competition, held every year at Charles Sturt University campus in Wagga. I competed as part of the team from the University of Melbourne, after a semester of training and early mornings at abattoirs, all on top of our normal university course. The training alone has changed the way I view the industry. As an aspiring producer, and someone who has grown up on a farm, it was incredibly valuable to link what I am producing on-farm to what the consumer sees on their plate, and understand how what I did on farm, including what I was breeding for, would affect the final product.

Much to my surprise, I did quite well at the competition, meaning I was selected in the top 5 students, and would represent Australia in the US over January of 2018 in several American collegiate level meat judging competitions.

Meat judging is the process of ranking carcasses according to retail value, that is, according to the carcass that will yield the greatest percentage of closely trimmed retail cuts, with the greatest merchandising (quality) value. For example, in lamb, factors such as trimness over the leg, chump and breast, bluing over the loin, rack and shoulders, muscling in the leg and shoulders, definition of the loin edge and sirloin-loin junction, flank streaking (a measure of intramuscular fat and meat quality), and youthfulness of the carcass (measured through red round ribs) are all taken into account to place the carcasses in order of value. In addition to this, primals (larger sections of the carcass from which retail cuts are taken) are also judged in a similar. This occurs for beef, lamb and pork. Finally, additional beef classes of pricing (based on a grid and carcass discounts) and MSA grading are also included.

The team had a very successful tour, taking out several of the individual and team categories, as well as placing as first team in both the Southwestern Invitational in Lubbock, Texas (never before achieved by the Aussie team), and the National Western in Denver, Colorado (not achieved for 17 years).

After the conclusion of the competitions, we had some time to travel through the Midwest to learn about the US meat industries. We visited a range of producers, feedlots, research stations and processing plants across Texas, Colorado, Nebraska and Kansas, covering the beef, lamb and pork industries. It was incredible to see the scale of the industries in the US, particularly the beef industry. We visited feedlots with capacities of 100,000 head, and abattoirs capable of processing over 5000 head per day (one every 6 seconds). We also toured several of the major agricultural universities in the US, including Texas A&M, Colorado State University and Kansas State University. We even got to meet the one and only Temple Grandin, to talk about animal behaviour and her research in this field.

While our official tour finished in late January, I had earlier elected to stay on for a further two weeks to visit some more sheep properties in Texas. Through some of the contacts I had made from the American Lamb Board through our tour, I was invited to attend the American Sheep Industry National Conference, in San Antonio, Texas. The ASI Conference brings together producers, processors and a range of industry professionals from the US lamb industry, to discuss a wide range of issues and opportunities their industry faces.

I am so grateful to the Future Farmers Network for supporting me to attend the ICMJ tour. Through the trip I learned so much about the US meat industries, as well as the

meat value chain in general, from production to consumption. I was also able to learn about the US as well as Australian red meat industries in context of worldwide supply and demand. Finally, I was able to make incredible connections within the US, and hope to be able to go back to the US to strengthen these connections and learn even more.

I want to thank Future Farmers Network, as well as MLA and AMPC for making this tour possible for me. It has changed my career, and I hope in my career I can give back to the industry that has given so much to me.



The team at Texas A&M University campus chillers (I'm the short one on the left!)



The team at Kallion Farms, a Brahman stud where the manager (Grant) focuses on meat quality and temperament in his animals. It was  $-2^{\circ}\text{C}$  at the time which is why we look so cold!



The team at JBS Greeley, after the National Western Meat Judging Competition (Emily front right)