



## Member Profile

*Future Farmers Network (FFN) would like to thank all its members for their support and membership. Recognising and showcasing its members is important to FFN and each month a member will be profiled in the FFN Newsletter.*

**FFN member: Jo Robertson, QLD**

**Job/Role:** Beef Extension Officer

**Company/Organisation:** Queensland Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

**Location:** Charters Towers, Queensland

### **What is your involvement in the agriculture industry?**

I have been involved in the agriculture industry since the day I was born. My birth date just so happened to coincide with shearing on my family's property. Every year since I've celebrated my birthday in the shearing shed, in the sheep yards or on a bike behind a mob of sheep. Growing up on a mixed farming property in central west New South Wales I was always surrounded by a variety of agricultural enterprises including cattle, sheep, water buffalo and cropping.

Throughout high school and university I worked for numerous cattle studs showing cattle at local, interstate and royal shows. This was an amazing experience which opened my eyes to the study cattle industry, as I came from a commercial background.

To further my education in the field of agriculture I studied a Bachelor of Livestock Science at the University of New England. My first job out of university was with the NSW Department of Primary Industries graduate program for which I was based in Armidale. I gained a lot of experience in extension, meat quality research, live animal assessment in both sheep and cattle as well as working for the public sector. Whilst in this position I also developed an invaluable network of professionals within varying fields of agricultural research, development and extension.

In July 2013 I started work for the Queensland Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) as a Beef Extension Officer in Charters Towers. There is never a dull moment in this job as there is something different happening every day. As an Extension Officer I field enquires from graziers that cover a broad range of areas including grazing land management, herd management, nutrition, reproduction, remote management technologies and economics just to name a few. Along with fielding enquires I also assist in the organisation and running other extension events such as field days, workshops and property visits.

In the future I plan to return home to NSW to take on the family property. However, between now and then anything could happen!

**What is the best part of your job/role?** The people, the landscape, the weather and the cattle!



**Identify three (3) key challenges facing young Australian farmers/agribusiness professionals:**

- Job security- a lot of jobs are now based on contracts, making planning for the future very difficult.
- Negative perception in the media
- Declining terms of trade

**Name three (3) things you can't function without:** My kelpie Trixie, sleep and my mobile phone (as much as I don't like to admit it)

**What's one (1) thing people don't know about you?** I'm mad about water buffalo (although this may not be that much of a secret)!

I plan to re-build my family's buffalo herd when I return to home to the family property. Until then I remain an active member of the Australian Buffalo Industry Council and a panel member for the Animal Industries Program for the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC).

**If you had three (3) pieces of advice for young people considering a career in agriculture what would they be?**

- Work hard
- Give everything a go at least once
- If you don't know something, ask (there is no such thing as a stupid question)

**Rabobank hosted an F20 Summit this month and one of the issues raised was the need to "bridge the urban/rural divide". Do you agree with this notion and, if so, what would one (1) recommendation you have to achieve this?**

I agree with the notion very much so. Coming from a farming background with cousins in the city it was just as much about them teaching me about the city as it was me teaching them about the country. During high school and university I attended numerous shows with stud cattle. As part of showing cattle you were always talking to the public and coming across misinformed individuals. One particular incident that has always stuck with me was one year at Sydney Royal Easter Show. I was standing on the outside the judging ring with a Lowline bull. A little boy came running up pointing and screaming "Mum, Mum, look at the elephant!" Now I can excuse the kid for their lack of understanding but when the mother replied with "yes son" and walked away, I was astounded. Surely this lady knew that it wasn't an elephant?

Showing cattle opened my eyes to a whole different side of showing cattle. It wasn't just about competing with the other studs for the broad ribbons. It was just as much about educating our city counterparts about the industry that we live and breathe for.

Unfortunately I don't believe that there is a straight forward solution to bridging the gap. It's not so much a recommendation as such but a view that agriculture should be taught from day one of school, even pre-school. The information is out there, it's just not making it into the classrooms and other learning environments as readily as it could be. Also, events like the royal agricultural shows in capital cities should be seen as prime events for agriculture to share its story in a positive light. Plant the seed of curiosity so that the next time those in the city go to the supermarket they think about where the food they are purchasing came from.



**You were recently announced as a successful candidate for Beef Australia's *Graeme Action Beef Connections program*, what does this mean to you and how do you see it benefiting yourself and the broader Australian beef industry?**

To be accepted for this program is extremely exciting and humbling. I am really looking forward to the program and pushing myself out of my comfort zone. There are a few areas I would like to work on both personally and professionally and I believe this program will help me in these areas. This program will also be a great opportunity to network with not only the other participants but also the industry leaders that will be present at Beef 2015 as well as those selected as mentors. In this industry it is important to make networks because you never know where those networks will take you. I hope to be able to give back in my position as an Extension Officer through bettering my skills in extension and furthering my technical knowledge. I also hope to continue working with the local high schools sharing my experience and knowledge. I hope by passing on my experiences of this program that it will encourage students to work towards applying for this kind of program in the future.

**What is your vision for Australian agriculture?** Innovative, profitable, productive and a world leader in agriculture.

**Why are you an FFN member?** The FFN provides a platform for like-minded young professionals to share ideas, network, support each other and obtain information about job seeking and career development.

