

# An Aussie Perspective

## An Aussie perspective continued...

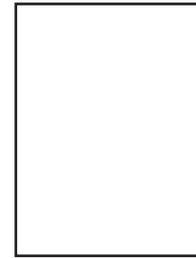
This month's article begins in Missouri with the Alden Family. Alden Farms have had a significant influence on some Australian Shorthorns through the exportation of embryos most notably the Margie cow family. My time at Alden Farms was brief but it was great to see where these female lines originated.

I was then taken to Manhattan, Kansas for the weekend where I met Matt and Jalane Vaughn. Matt is a muscle biologist at Kansas State University which gave me the opportunity to tour the universities animal and veterinary science schools. The research currently taking place within the beef industry is exciting. I am beginning to see more and more that the progression of the beef industry remains in its infant stages as there is still so much future potential. Researchers are slowly uncovering new pieces of the puzzle that have the potential to greatly improve productivity. An area that I feel is particularly exciting is progression towards the economically feasible selection for feed efficiency. The bull test station idea is a good concept however does not come without its problems. One of my concerns is if these bull test stations facilitate the development of fertile bulls that have longevity. Greater average daily gains in bulls may look good on paper but will inevitably cause problems. It seems these stations are predominantly used simply as a way of getting growing bulls off increasingly hard to find pasture. This brings up a key question. Does feed efficiency of cattle in the feedlot have any association with feed efficiency on pasture or perhaps are they inversely related? We are making great progress towards being able to select the most profitable animals but caution must be taken as animals are not magical. For every gain you make for one trait there is often a trade off in another direction. For example will selecting for feed efficiency result in an inadvertent selection for leaner cattle? This is because fat is more energy dense than muscle and as a result production of fat by the body has a lower feed conversion rate than production of muscle. But researchers are slowly solving these problems, but I think it is important as a producer to understand

how complex implications of selection decisions can be. Thus advancements are exciting but I think it is important to consider the entire picture.

While at the Vaughn's I made a brief but interesting visit to Matt Davis's small Shorthorn herd in the area. He is a small breeder that is establishing himself a small but loyal group of freezer beef clients. Some of these animals were interestingly grass finished. While in Kansas I was able to pay a short visit to a local feedlot that was utilizing a potato processors by-products as a feed source. I've seen many dairy's in the USA utilizing by-products. One Californian nutritionist said "we try to feed anything". Similar to the push for greater feed efficiency by-product use is driven by high feed costs. It also offers another question will the most feed efficient animals on one feedlot ration be the most efficient on another? Sorry for leaving so many questions in this article, but something I have found out is the more you learn the more you find out you don't know. Which is what drives scientific advancement and our thirst for greater knowledge.

I then returned to Missouri to spend some time with Jake Alden. I was lucky enough to be able to spend a day enjoying St. Louis. We went to the top of the Gateway Arch, toured the Anheuser Busch brewery and went for a helicopter tour over the Mississippi River. The helicopter ride was a lot of fun but it also helped give some perspective to just how big the Mississippi River is. While I was there the water was flowing rapidly from the huge amount of rain that has been falling recently. While with Jake we also visited a few Shorthorn herds. Rob Sneed, James Sneed, Crestmead and Ravenswood Shorthorns. There were some fantastic cows at these operations. All of the operations had a different approach to what was selected for. Even within such a small area where the environment is the same. The Sneed's herds have a strong commercial focus. Crestmead was really interesting because of the long history at the enterprise. Which is similar to Ravenswood as this was the first property west of the Mississippi to have Shorthorns and are only recently returning to breeding Shorthorn cattle.



**Hayden Morrow** | Australian Shorthorn Ambassador

Following these herd visits I was then lucky enough to spend some time with Jake Alden's fiancé's family. This enabled me to get a tour of a POET ethanol plant. It was a great opportunity to get some insight into ethanol production but also the production of Distillers Dried Grains with Solubles (DDGS). The ethanol industry is significantly larger in the US than Australia partly driven by the availability of corn. I have heard many producers describe that DDGS they use is very variable in nutritional value between batches. I was assured though that at this particular plant feed quality was very well monitored and consistently meets specifications as it is an important source of income for the plant. What was very interesting is that while the general ethanol production process is well described there are many small differences in processes between plants that results in significant profitability variation between plants. Particularly in the area of utilizing enzymes efficiently as yeast is one of the most significant costs. As further investment by the industry moves towards production of ethanol from cellulose it will be very interesting how this will affect both fuel prices and corn markets into the future. I was also lucky enough to spend a day watching the fireworks professionals of Missouri practicing with the latest fireworks available before the fireworks season takes full swing. There is no doubt I've had plenty of opportunity to enjoy myself on this trip.

Leveldale Farms is a Shorthorn herd that has a long and successful history. I find herds like this to be very intriguing. What are the critical factors allowing them to stand the test of time while others enter and leave the industry? Unlike earlier in my trip when making herd visits during the winter, spring was defiantly in full flight when I arrived at Leveldale. While at Leveldale we spent a significant amount of time flushing cows as Scott Wall also operates Ova Time from Leveldale. This herd has an impressive group of very maternal productive cows that also combine this with an attractive phenotype. The type

of females I would love to see the show industry embrace more as they are practical yet eye pleasing cattle.

I then travelled to Moore Shorthorns in Jerseyville, Illinois. It's always enjoyable to visit a herd that is a family operation in which everybody combines their skills and interests together enabling a well managed herd but also a really positive atmosphere. Moore Shorthorns have a passion for showing cattle. Interestingly though they are also very conscious of breeding females that "will make a cow". It sounds ridiculous to have to highlight this, as common sense would think all herds would emphasise this. Unfortunately they don't all. It was good to see their recent sire addition Alta Cedar North Face out with the cows. He is a bull that defiantly caused some discussion and debate at Denver this year. There is no doubt he has some impressive features, it will be very interesting to see some calves hitting the ground in the USA and potentially internationally. Sarah Moore is also heavily involved in breeding and showing Polled Dorset sheep. They are defiantly eye catching sheep. In comparison to Australian sheep they are huge!!! They have had a lot of success in the show ring and are impressive animals.

I was really looking forward to the next leg of my trip. I flew to Biloxi, Mississippi for the annual Beef Improvement Federation Convention (BIF). This convention is where some of the latest research occurring in the beef industry is presented to attendees. It is a really good mix of people including academics, breed associations, producers and many company representatives. The majority of people were from the USA however there were a good number of international attendees. A very diverse range of topics were discussed throughout the convention with a focus on genetic technology and cow efficiency. I really enjoyed the convention due to the talks but also the opportunity to meet many people that

are the leaders in the beef industry pushing for improvement. I would like to encourage more Shorthorn breeders to participate next year in Manhattan, Kansas, particularly those that are focusing on producing cattle for the commercial cattlemen. I enjoyed the agricultural tour on the final day around Mississippi as it offered an opportunity to see different enterprises such as peanuts, crawfish, Brahman cattle and many more. After some flight delays I did get stuck in Biloxi for a couple of extra days. So I just had to put up with the beautiful warm weather and seafood on the Gulf of Mexico for a bit longer. Not a bad deal. Thank you though to the Jordan Family from Waukaru, Indiana who were in attendance for dropping me off at my next destination, Nashville. The willingness of people to help me out is greatly appreciated and makes my trip 10 times better than I could have anticipated.

So during the few days I was in Nashville I had an absolute blast with Joe Donnelly and Kelsey Artz from North Dakota. While we were there CMA Festival was on so I got to see the country music capital in full flight. We were lucky enough to get some tickets to the final concert of the festival which featured Cole Swindel, Darius Rucker, Brad Paisley, Eric Church and Aussie Keith Urban. Tennessee lived up to its reputation as the volunteer state as everybody was always willing to help me out without a second thought.

I next flew back to Omaha, Nebraska. Straight after arriving I went and spent half a day at the Omaha Zoo. For those of you that don't know much about the Omaha Zoo it has been ranked by some groups as the number 1 zoo in the world. It lived up to this reputation. I had an awesome time walking through the exhibits that included the big cats, desert dome, nocturnal exhibit, gorilla valley and many more cool things to see. While in Omaha I also went to a sold out Collage World Series Baseball game with Katie Horton. It was a lot of fun.

The popularity and money behind collage sport in the USA has me completely amazed.

The following day I arrived at Grand Island, Nebraska for the Shorthorn Junior Nationals. I was really looking forward to this event especially as it gave a great opportunity to catch up with people I had met throughout my trip. I have never seen facilities quite like Grand Islands. A fully air conditioned show ring complete with a big screen to watch the action unfold. The event was a great success. I have heard people say many times that the Shorthorn breed has a great sense of community and cooperation which is very evident at Junior Nationals. It's a competitive yet encouraging environment. The range of competitions is vast. There are competitions aimed at members of all ages, skill levels and talents. There are competitions for the fitters, the cooks, judges, showman, marketers, public speakers and many more. I was lucky enough to be given the opportunity to judge the poster competition. So now I can try and claim having judged at cattle shows internationally. The long distances that competitor's travel to participate in the event is a testament to how enjoyable it is. The event is highly reliant upon people's generosity and creativity for fundraising. The "Doody calls" idea which involved the nomination of people to be responsible for keeping the ring manure free during judging was a highlight. It's always good to see the executive secretary out with a rake.

I then spent a couple of days with Shorthorn interns Will Moore and Rachel Metzger in Omaha. The Omaha Zoo was so good I went back again and then experienced "A Dine In" cinema. Thanks a lot I had a great weekend. I now have less than a month left on this program. Thank you so much to everybody that has looked after me and shown me a great time. Canada for a couple of weeks is next on the agenda.☑