

A plane soars through the air at 10,000 feet. 23 weary travelers eagerly await the touch down of the final flight of the 33 hour travel day. These tired passengers are students from the Department of Agricultural Sciences who embarked on a journey in Australia to learn more about agriculture abroad.

The group encompassed majors ranging from animal science pre-veterinary to agricultural communications and students ranging from sophomores to graduate students within WT Agriculture

When the plane touched down in Rockhampton, Australia, these twenty three students were going to learn just that. The knowledge and experience they would gain over the next few weeks would be absolutely informative to not only their education, but their lives as well. The group toured feedlots, meat processing plants, local agriculture colleges and several different kinds of farms.

Macy Compton, a WT Agriculture graduate student working toward her Masters in Plant, Soil, and Environmental Science who participated in the study abroad, looked back on her time spent in Australia.

“My study abroad experience in Australia was formative in advancing my understanding of ecological rangeland dynamics and pastoral beef cattle management, broadening my research perspective within global grazing systems, and not to mention I had an absolutely amazing time!” She smiled widely as she said. .

Not only did the “Ag in Australia Trip” help Compton advance her research, but it helped the students experience a whole new culture. While in Quirindi, Australia the participants were split into groups and sent to spend a night with different producers and local families in the area. Each experience was different, but each was transformative.

From getting to see firsthand the start of harvest, to moving cattle the Aussie way, to eating dinner with these families like it was a regular night, each student came back looking at the world a little differently.

Stuart and Trish Austin, producers based in Quirindi, Australia, absolutely loved getting to host the West Texas A&M University students on their station.

“Any opportunity to pilot hospitality and generosity I think is what motivated us to host and I also just love to share the message of Australian agriculture. Studying abroad is an opportunity to open your minds and create curiosity. Its something I try to impart on any young person these

days is just to get really curious and question everything. Open your minds to as many different possibilities,” Austin said.

One of the students who stayed with the Austins, Will Hauerland, a senior agricultural business and economics major, reminisced on his time at his farm stay,

“The experience I had in Australia was one of the best experiences of my life. I came back with a wealth of knowledge from my farm stay I am not sure I would have gained anywhere else. I had no idea the United States and Australia worked so closely together when it came to agriculture issues”

As the group traveled along the Eastern coast of Australia, they encountered everything from cities to small farming villages. The striking resemblance to different parts of Texas were interesting to the participants. In the people they encountered, they felt at home. Agriculturalists are the same all across the world, hard working people, who are working to feed the world.

The students' time in the Land Down Under was coming to a close. They had traveled from the top of the Eastern Coast to the bottom, ending in Sydney. By bus they had traveled over a thousand miles. The group had gained not only agricultural knowledge, but wisdom as well. A type of wisdom that can only be gained through experience.

Dr. Bridget Guerrero, '02,'03, Associate Professor of Agricultural Business and Economics and West Texas A&M University Graduate, knows this all too well. She has led several study abroad trips to different countries.

“Studying abroad gives students a good perspective and a chance to get out of your silo and see what else there is in the world. I think sometimes we are really proud of the way we do things and we think our way is the best, but there is a lot of value in being open to how other people approach things and what kind of technologies they are using or how they do different systems,” Guerrero said.

There were many things to consider when organizing an educational trip such as this. Guerrero smiled lightly as she remembered the countless hours spent arranging the “Ag in Australia Trip”.

“When deciding on what stops to make, we knew we would have students from all majors within agriculture go on the trip so we really thought it would be important to hit on the things students were familiar with, but also I think it is equally more important to introduce them to things that they have never seen before.”

Dr. Mallory Vestal, '05, Assistant Department Head, Associate Professor of Agricultural Business and Economics, and West Texas A&M University Graduate, was the second faculty member to accompany the group. She echoed Guerrero's sentiments closely,

“I think the biggest thing that students gain a better understanding of is globalization. They learn how economies work together and how different countries have differing resources and how they use them to their advantage. Students also are exposed to different ways of thinking and opinions that they may not be shown in the United States. Unless we see a different cultural perspective, all we think of is our own.”

They entered the country of Australia hoping to learn new agricultural techniques and left with the wisdom to carry them through their careers and lives. The participants gained new friends, mentors, and passions. All because they said “yes” to Study Abroad at West Texas A&M University.