



**Queensland Country Life column**

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**The Australian beef industry is 'adaptable, innovative and resilient' noted one participant coming away from this year's Cattle Council Rural Awareness Tour.**

Canberra-based government officials headed out of their offices and into the paddock with the Cattle Council of Australia this month to gain a grass roots perspective on the big issues facing the Australian beef industry.

Cattle Council President, Greg Brown, said that the annual "Rural Awareness Tour" was a big success, providing a practical understanding of beef industry production systems to help Federal Government officials become more aware of the 'on-the ground' issues when implementing high-level policy.

Employees from the Federal Department of Agriculture, the Department of Environment, Heritage and the Arts, AUS-MEAT and Meat and Livestock Australia visited seedstocks, commercial cattle and mixed farming properties, feedlots, abattoirs, international meat traders, butchers, supermarkets, saleyards, livestock exporter organizations and tertiary research and teaching facilities over a weeklong cattle industry tour throughout NSW.

Tour Host, Cattle Councillor and NSW Young Farmers' Association chair, Sam Gunn, said participants were surprised and inspired by the degree of innovation and sophistication throughout the whole red meat supply chain to deliver a product of integrity.

"By the end of the tour, participants recognised the beef industry as a stand out industry. They'd witnessed the production efficiencies throughout the supply chain 'first-hand' and recognised the environmental credentials of beef producers as stewards of the land and producers of a high quality, and high integrity product," said Mr Gunn.

"On day one, participants found out they knew nothing about MSA grading. Issues around truth in labeling and retail marketing kept popping up, and on day five, participants quizzed the meat buyers for Coles supermarket on beef quality issues – it was quite phenomenal the learning experience they had undertaken," said Mr Gunn.

"Accessibility to both well-informed people of our industry, such as Don Mackay, Director of Rangers Valley Feedlot, and the average beef producer at the Walgett cattle sale, provided opportunities for frank and open discussions between Government and Industry.

"These guys can now call up Peter from the Hunter Valley in NSW and ask him about the issues he's facing on the ground – they now have an avenue for testing the pulse of the industry," said Mr Gunn.

Of particular interest to participants was the Government's Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme (CPRS) and its affect on the red meat supply chain.

"Everyone recognised that climate change policy would have a severe affect on the beef industry; it was a consistent message throughout the tour and they heard it from the horses mouth. We ensured they understood that as innovators and stewards of the land, we are part of the solution, and not the problem," said Mr Gunn.

"Cattle Council valued discussion on the issues raised by participants throughout the tour

such as water use, seasonal variability, productivity measurement, on-farm risk management, innovation and adaptability, consumer marketing and emissions trading.

"Some participants observed that our industry has excellent potential for productivity growth. However, we are in need of better tools to manage uncertainty.

"One believed more discussions and conversations needed to take place between Industry and Government to understand the differences and similarities of the issues affecting both parties.

"Cattle Council will harness the relationships forged on the 'RAT' and encourage further engagement from the Australian Government on the issues that affect beef producers productivity and profitability into the future," concluded Mr Gunn.

By Greg Brown and Sam Gunn