

‘THE TRANS-TASMAN EXCHANGE EXPERIENCE’

Charlie Raff



Legs sore, heart pumping, with a panorama view of mountains like islands in a sea of clouds. This situation I found myself in, mustering wethers at the top of the 1,700-meter ascent of Purple Hill Mountain at Craigieburn Station. Was thanks to the opportunity through the Trans-Tasman Exchange. Thank you to the Angus Foundation and the New England Travel Centre, who provided this incredible exchange opportunity. An opportunity to immerse myself in New Zealand's unique production systems and environments. An experience I will never forget!

My mindset walking into the TransTasman Exchange opportunity was open. I wanted to absorb as much knowledge and first-hand experience of the

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agricultural production systems throughout New Zealand as possible. I was particularly excited to learn about the Angus seedstock production systems throughout New Zealand. The merit of seed stock production is that everyone has different opinions and breeding philosophies. There is no step-by-step tutorial on how to breed a superior animal, and throughout my endeavours, I was eager to learn many individual interpretations of Angus breeding and animal selection specific to the country's unique environment. I was in a fortunate situation, having graduated school in 2024 and deciding to elect a gap year, it just so worked out that I could spend 4 months, from August to December, in the country during my visit.

I had the idea to plan my travels from as far north in the North Island to the south of the South. A New Zealand term would summarize this as a ‘ticky tour’. From the family Angus cattle stud ‘Raff Angus’ on King Island, to Melbourne, Auckland and the final destination Kerikeri. It wasn’t long during my time at Waitangi Angus before I learnt what rain in the country was. I was invited by 100mm during my first few days, a mere drop in the ocean of their 3.8 meters of annual rainfall. My time here was an introduction to hills that I would expect to see in Gisborne on the East Coast. A short flight from Kerikeri and I was in the thick of Angus seed stock production, Gisborne. I spent 4 weeks here. A place where sheep and Angus cattle grazed hills I thought impossible. My visit to Gisborne gave me a strong perspective of how the New Zealand Angus breed has been tailored to suit the country's unique and often rugged farming landscape, where moderate-framed, sound animals, built from the ground up, are better suited to the steep landscape. I was fortunate to spend three weeks working with Tangihau Station, a 6,500-hectare sheep and beef property with the leading Angus stud in the

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country of recent times. I would spend the day-to-day with the team of 6 shepherds or ‘jackeroo’ in Australian terms. This was an incredible experience and one of the many highlights of my trip. We spent a lot of time on horseback as the shepherds mustered stock with their teams of huntaway and heading dogs.

‘Tangihau Station’



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The further south I travelled the less ‘bro’ I heard, and the colder it became. Crops of fodder beet and kale became an increasing trend. These crops provide nutritional value for stock during the winter months, although strict government regulations on runoff and soil health present challenges that require farmers to balance productivity with environmental compliance. One thing I could not help but notice during my travels throughout the North Island was the significant mass of pine forest plantations taking over productive agricultural land. Approximately 1.7 million hectares across the country is now in commercial forestry. This shift has contributed to a decline in livestock numbers, with sheep numbers dropping by 2.7% and cattle by 1.4% over the past year, as more land is converted from farming to forestry.



A short trip on the ferry and I was on the South Island. The South Island’s diverse ranging landscape from steep rugged mountain terrain to fertile, flat plains, was at the forefront of my eye as I arrived at Taimate in Blenheim. Looking past the rows of vineyards were plenty of strong Angus cattle. The further south I travelled the flat paddocks comprising angus cows started to turn into black cows with white spots. Centre pivots supporting both extensive livestock grazing and high-yield crop farming became a frequent sight.

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My four-week stay with Grampians Angus will be a lasting memory from my journey. The farm situated at the foot of a snow-capped mountain gave me a true representation of the country's contrasting topography and an appreciation of the environment that the angus cow must perform in. My time here endured ‘tailing’ ‘docking’ or ‘lamb marking’ the crop of lambs, tagging and weighing calves at birth, and fencing.

I was fascinated to learn about livestock reproduction, and the team at Target Breeding Centre took me under their wing. My time there was a valuable educational experience, giving me hands-on insight into reproduction in both beef and dairy cattle. I had the opportunity to observe and understand various processes, including embryo transfer, artificial insemination, palpation, and semen collection. I left with an appreciation for the science and skill involved in breeding and further the numerous factors that go into having a successful breeding program.

Getting from A to B during my travels presented its challenges, as a 19-year-old I was unable to hire a car for transport, though the support I was shown from farm to farm was amazing. Whether it was someone driving nearly 3 hours to pick me up, putting me on a bus or piling me in a car when there was already no room for me, let alone my big old suitcase. Throughout my endeavours, I grew a deep appreciation for the community that the Angus breed has fostered.

In reflection of my trip, I cannot express my gratitude enough to the generous people who hosted me throughout my travels, a debt I hope to repay one day. After visiting 11 Angus Cattle Studs, 2 Commercial Beef & Lamb Properties, 1

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Breeding Centre and travelling over 2,430km I can confidently say I am walking away from the Trans-Tasman exchange experience with a wealth of knowledge. The education I gained through the opportunity to immerse myself in New Zealand's unique production systems and environments and learn from some of the best in the industry has been invaluable. To all future Trans-Tasman exchange recipients, I encourage you to make the most of the opportunity, and spend as much time as you can. Walk into the opportunity with an open mindset and a passion for learning, this exchange has equipped me with invaluable insights and experiences that I will carry forward into my future.

Waitangi Angus

Tangihau Station

Kaharau Angus

Turihaua Angus

Matangi Beef

Totaranui Angus

Mt Mable Angus

Ranui Angus

Taimate Angus

Grampians Angus

Craigieburn Station

Cleardale Station

Stern Angus

Target Breeding Centre

11 Angus Cattle Studs

2 Commercial Beef & Lamb Properties

1 Breeding Centre

2,430km traveled

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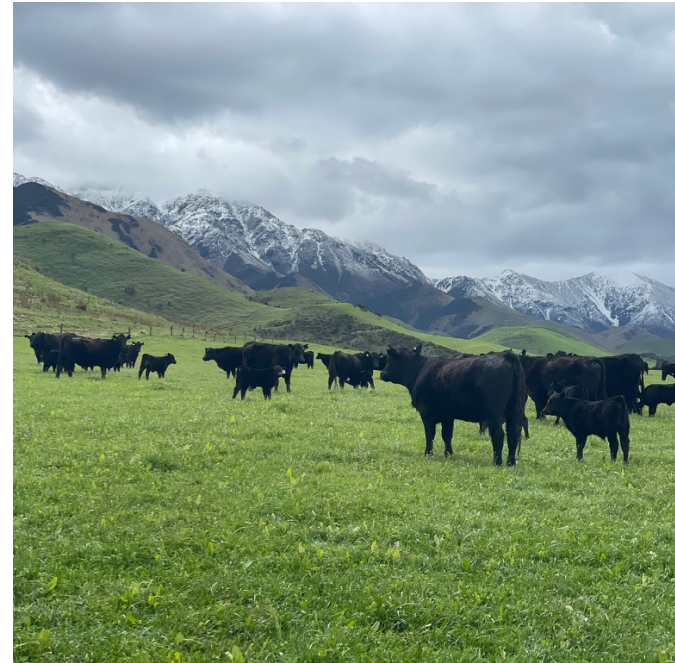
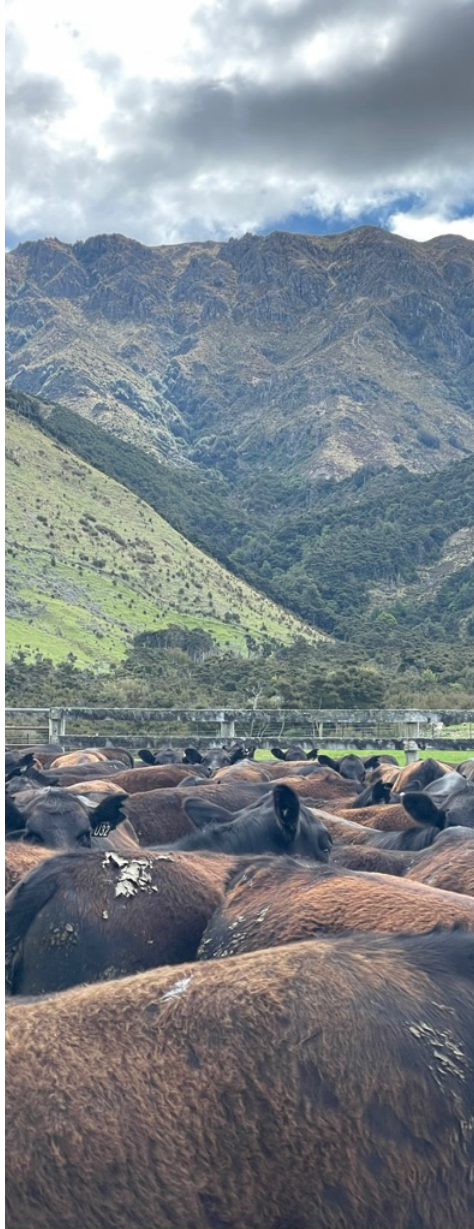
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‘Grampians Angus’



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‘Tangihau Station’



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‘Centre Pivot’



‘Stern Angus’



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'Target Breeding Centre Oamaru'



'Craigieburn Station'

