

Alicia riding Rascal



Our dogs, Rocky and Zues



Jordan, Mackenzie and Montana with Rascal



McAvoy & Sons - Daradgee and Dinner Creek via Innisfail

1. Name: Alicia McAvoy DOB: 50 years old

Who is in your farming family?

I'm Alicia McAvoy (Moller) and I'm married to Mark McAvoy. We have six children, Luke, Jordan, Hunter, Montana, Mackenzie, and Stirling. We've been married 19 years and we have lived here in this house for 12 years, but before that, in the other farm house at Dinner Creek.

Our pet horse is Rascal, and we have 2 dogs, Rocky and Zeus.

We are in partnership on the farm with Mark's brother and wife, and Mark's mother. It's one big family business.

Where is your farm and what do you farm?

We have two farms, one at Daradgee and another one at Dinner Creek (just down the road). We have 600 acres of farming land, 400 acres under sugar cane, and about 135 acres of Cavendish bananas.

What is your farming background?

Mark and I are 4th generation farmers, so our children are now 5th generation farmers.

2. Farming Memories - What has been so special for you living on a family farm?

I grew up on a farm at Aloombah on the banks of Behanna Creek. All the children in the area had horses, so we very much grew up on horses. We would always be getting together for picnic races and polo, we would meet every Saturday morning at a place called 'Fixtures Flats'. There would be relay races; we would race our horses as fast as we could, trying to pull them up before the wall of solid rainforest at the end of the flat. Quite often we couldn't stop the horses in time so we would end up going bush down a narrow trail into the rainforest before coming to a safe stop. It was a lot of fun.

This particular day, one of the horses got spooked and reared up. The rider fell off and the horse was pulled back and toppled onto the rider on the ground. She was a young girl of twelve. We did not know at the time but she had fractured her pelvis and was in a lot of pain — she couldn't move, she was in agony. We managed to get the horse up but needed to get help urgently.

It was a mad dash, my horse had won that day so I was the volunteer rider to go and get help. I set off on my pony and rode home as fast as I could to get help for her. It was scary, it was exciting. I remember tearing into the driveway screaming out to Dad. He did not know what on earth was going on, but we were very lucky help came quickly and she ended up being all right. Everybody jumped in cars and raced down there. The ambulance came, packaged her up and took her off to hospital.

That's what it's like growing up on a farm, you have to be prepared for things like that if they happen.

My friend and I were walking through a headland, we were only 10 or 11, when a very large wild cat, got spooked by the dogs. The cat just went crazy. I don't know what was wrong with it. It jumped at my friend, clawed her and bit into her chest. We had to fight it off her with a stick and race her home. She had very bad bites. I think the cat thought she was a tree and was trying to get away from the dogs. As we were older it became quite a joke; she was called 'the tree' for a while, but at the time it was very scary.

3. Farming Life Experiences - Family farming presents many challenges which often involve considerable effort to resolve. What experiences can you recall which presented you and your family with a significant problem?

The farm that we live on has been in the family a long, long time and we have recently decided to sell some of the property. In the old days there was no running water, so they dug wells. One of the blocks for sale has a very deep well which has not been used for years. In order to sell the property we must make the well secure. You can't go to a supermarket to buy a well lid, so my husband is making a lid from scratch. He is making it from stainless steel, so he has to make up a pattern and use a welder to build it. He will hand make a lid that we can lock. It will make the well accessible for the new buyers.

4. Looking Back - What lessons were learnt? What has your farming life taught you?

It's a great lifestyle but it's hard. I laugh when I see these shows on TV, "Marry a Farmer". It's not like that. Your husband might be gone from 5am in the morning and during the cane season, he is away from the house for really long hours doing tractor work. It's a great life though because you are your own boss.

There is a great amount of freedom for kids growing up on a farm. Kids can run around and swim and play and have animals — that is 100 times better than living in the city. But it's not all glamorous, the money is hard. The small profit you make — it's hard work to make it. All the time you are up against government restrictions. Farming practices have changed 10 fold in my 50 years, so I'm not sure what the next 50 will bring. In this area it's getting tougher and tougher for farming people to stay abreast of all the requirements. Many older farmers are not well educated and dealing with all the paperwork and bureaucracy is too hard. That's why a lot of farmers are getting out of it.

If you ask me, "Do I hope my children take over the farm?" Probably not. I hope they find some other job. It's so challenging and then there are all those other factors to deal with, like mother nature. You can have a great crop and just watch it blow away.

If you don't want to work hard, don't be a farmer.



Kids swimming in Babinda Creek



Kids goofing around after a day in the paddock cleaning up the Pine Trees after one of the cyclones. They worked helping cut and move out stumps...bit of fun. From left: Mark, Hunter, Mackenzie, Jordan, Montana and Stirling.

We would often swim the flooded creeks, jumping on logs and floating down. You would go under canopies with snakes hanging out of them because of the flood. Sometimes you think - it's a wonder we got through all of that safely.

When you were on horseback, it was an experience to deal with snakes. We could all kill a snake pretty easy.

You learn pretty quick as a child how to survive. We were often gone the whole day on our horses, 6 or 7 hours, just riding and swimming. We would take potatoes and alfalfa and we would make a fire. We would cook our little spud and that would be our lunch.