



Mustering on horseback and with motorbikes

Green Hills Cattle Station

Georgetown

1. Name: Greg Ryan

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Who is in your farming family?

There's me and Carol my wife. We have an older daughter Carmen who is 24, working in Rockhampton. We have a younger daughter Melinda, who's here at home doing an external uni course, along with a couple of days a week work in town. But she's available if we need a hand. When we are mustering we employ some casuals.

We have a few horses we use when we muster. Our Corgi dog is called Rebel, but he doesn't come mustering. We don't use dogs mustering. Our best horses are Rambler, Beau, and Dusty - they're the 3 best ones.

Where is your farm and what do you farm?

Our property is 50 km south-west of Georgetown, and about 400km south-west of Daradgee. We grow beef cattle here, that's all. We've got about 3500 of them and they run on 65 000 acres. In the wet, we supplementary feed, it's a dry lick that is phosphorous based because our soils here are low in phosphorous. In the dry, we supplement our weaners with molasses.

We get isolated in the wet season for about a month. The Gilbert River runs through our property and we live on the western side of it. So to get to town we have to cross the Gilbert, in flood it's probably 2-300 m wide - hard to believe because it's just dry sand at the moment. We do put a couple of vehicles on the other side of the river before the wet and we can use a little tinny to get to them if we need to. It can be a bit of a hassle.

For shopping, we can get limited stuff in Georgetown, but to do a decent shop we go to Atherton. It's a 4 ½ hour drive one way. We go to town 6 times a year and work the trips in to do as much as possible while we are there. Ahead of the wet season, we do a big order, which is probably \$1500 worth of groceries, to see us through.

What is your farming background?

I'm a 3rd generation farmer on this place. Mum and Dad had it before us, and Mum's uncles before that. It's always been a cattle farm. We have Brahmans now but in days gone by they were Droughtmasters. We buy all our bulls in and breed about 800 calves a year.

2. Farming Memories - What has been so special for you living on a family farm? Recount one of your favourite memories, events or part of your growing up.

A fond memory that I hold was as a kid when I was first allowed to go mustering. I was probably about 8 years old when I first started going out with the men. We used to have our little old pony to go mustering on. 'Whipstick' was my first little pony, then a few others, like, 'Screamin' Creamy' (a cream horse). It was always fun.

As kids out mustering, we were always racing around jumping gullies and jumping logs. If any old cow stuck her head out the mob, you'd take her for a bit of a run around the flat. That's how we learned to ride, I guess.

It felt good to be included as one of the men and it was very important work too. You started to learn from day one, how to handle cattle and how to yard them. When you got back to the yards there was more to do. I was taught how to push cattle up the crush and how to brand calves. In the early days you would be given simple jobs to get you started and get you on the road to learning.

Before we were old enough to go mustering, horse riding was restricted to the house yard or maybe riding up to the front gate, so going mustering was great.

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?

1974 was the year of the big flood. I was only 12 years old, but I remember it very plainly. The Gilbert River just kept rising and ended up coming about 5ft (1.5m) through our house. (it had never flooded into the house before and has not done so since either). We knew the river was gonna get high, but we didn't realise it would get that high.

Obviously, we had to get out of the house, so we drove out onto the main bitumen road and rigged a tent in the middle of the road. We knew there'd be no cars coming! The next day we got into town.

The big job was the clean up afterward. It was safety first but coming back to a house with a lot of mud in it was a big job. We got in and cleaned it up, shovelled all the mud out and got a high pressure pump in to hose it out. All the towns' people helped us out washing clothes and sheets and everything. The next big job was outside - repairing fences which had been washed down. We lost a fair few stock in the event. Some horses just never turned up again, we don't know what happened to them.

One memorable thing was a bull that got sent back from a property about 100 km downstream. In flood, cattle just blow themselves up and float. That's what he (the bull) must have done, just laid on his side and blew himself up and floated. I think horses, panic, they do swim, but they knock up, tire out and drown. They don't float like a cow.

It was quite traumatic for us as kids — all our toys, and clothes and everything - lost. We had to start from scratch again.

You have to put safety first in front of any material possessions. 'Get out with your life' was our motto. We didn't worry about what was left behind. We knew the water would go down. Then it's time to put your nose to the grindstone and get what has to be done, done.

Everyone in the community was affected by the flood, and everyone was compassionate. If you found someone's horse or cow you'd get it back to them. The 'good' in people always comes out when there's an event like that.



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

I have totally enjoyed my life as a farmer, having the opportunity to live and work in outback Australia. We are away from mobile phone reception, and away from the noise and the lights of the city. The air and the environment is so clean, it's just wonderful to live out here, to work with nature and to enjoy nature.

You can hear, see and observe birds, wallabies, kangaroos, horses, cattle, dogs and anything else that lives here. It's just a beautiful, peaceful existence for me here, even though I have to work. Part of our work is observing all these things.

We try to work with nature as much as possible. As you know, Mother Nature is a harsh teacher. If you try and work against it you end up in all sorts of strife. We try and keep our environment healthy because we know the better our pastures and water resources are, the more productive our farm will be. We do this by not overstocking and spelling paddocks so they can recover after they have been grazed.

I have no qualifications on paper, but you need a lot of different skills to run a property like ours — more than most people might use in a lifetime. We have to be able to ride a horse and understand cattle behaviour. You need to build and repair fences or cattle yards and that includes welding, grinding and oxying. You need a bit of basic mechanical knowledge to keep machinery going. You have to have plumbing skills for fixing troughs and water tanks. You have to be able to drive the farm machinery like a truck, tractor, bull dozer, front end loader, and ride motor bikes or 4 wheelers. You need business savvy - prices, costs, when to sell. We have to analyse our business so we can improve it. It takes a life time to pick up a lot of these skills.

**We love it here, I wouldn't swap it for anywhere else in the world.
Our work and our leisure are all rolled into one.**

