**Queensland Government**

**Department of Agriculture and Fisheries**

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**Allycia is leading the way in the sheep and wool sector**

At 17 she left Brisbane’s bright lights to follow her dream of a career in the sheep and wool industry and in the seven years since Allycia Bennett hasn’t once missed city life.

Today, Allycia is one of the youngest district agency wool managers in Australia, the youth representative on Queensland’s Leading Sheep advisory panel, a founding member of the state’s innovative sheep network and one of a growing number of young people building a career in agriculture.

She has a steadfast belief in the future and potential opportunities in her chosen field.

“We are currently seeing a surge in interest in the sheep and wool industry in the state, that’s being driven by recent rain, improving wool prices, more exclusion fencing and increasing demand for sheep meat,” Allycia said.

“Listening to western Queensland producers talking about the merits of mixed (sheep and cattle) operations during the recent dry times makes me confident we will see more growth in coming years, which was one of the reasons I got involved with Leading Sheep.

“We need credible information sources for those returning to sheep as well as those venturing into the industry for the first time.

“Leading Sheep has a major role to play in facilitating that information and as a young person committed to the industry I want to have a part in that. I also want to encourage other young people to get involved in the sector… to understand there is a future in sheep and wool.”

From a personal perspective the Longreach-based agency wool manager credits hard work, self-belief and a genuine passion for the sheep and wool industry with her early success.

“I am not really one to talk myself up, I would prefer people to look at the hard work I have put into my career so far and think ‘that’s achievable, I could do that’,” Allycia explained.

“But I guess by sharing my story I hope to encourage other young people, particularly other young women, to consider a career in agriculture, regardless of their background or their experience, or, as in my case, lack of experience.”

Born and bred in Brisbane she was introduced to agriculture during her teenage years as a student at Rochedale High School.

“The school had a Suffolk stud and a classmate had friends who ran a Poll Dorset stud at Pittsworth, so when we weren’t showing or preparing the school’s flock we were helping out on the farm,” Allycia said.

After she finished high school she headed to Longreach Pastoral College, and after two years studying she landed a job at the Clarke and Tait-owned company property Powella, a 49,000 hectare (120,000ac) sheep and cattle holding near Aramac.

“College gave me the skills I needed to get started, along with a broad understanding of agriculture, then working in the industry just built on that,” Allycia said.

From Powella she moved south, working around Brewarrina in New South Wales, before returning to western Queensland and a position at Lansdowne, outside Tambo.

“Western Queensland has felt like home since I was a teenager, so when the opportunity came to come back, I jumped at it,” she explained.

It was also the reason she stifled her nerves to take on the slightly daunting task of district wool manager with Elders in 2014. While she said the role meant convincing some of the industry traditionalists that a “25-year-old girl” could handle the job, hard work and commitment was slowly reaping rewards.

“It hasn’t been easy, but women are increasingly having a say in rural operations at a financial level so generally we are seeing a shift in views in agriculture,” Allycia said.

“At a professional level there are more and more women working in the livestock agency industry, so I have been very fortunate to work in an incredibly respectful and supportive company.”

Allycia’s clients number around 110 and are scattered throughout western Queensland, running more than 200,000 18 – 23 micron sheep.

“Drought and wild dogs have caused an 80 per cent drop in wool production in our region during the past two years, but now thanks to rain and exclusion fencing we are starting to see a major surge in sheep numbers in the west,” Allycia said.

“As a result of the drought many producers now consider a mix of sheep and cattle as the best way to spread risk, reduce the financial impact of dry times and manage their country.

“Sheep require less feed and provide a faster return, so as producers get the wild dog problem under control they are venturing back into sheep.

“So we have seen a massive spike in ewe prices, upwards of $300 a head, and people are buying from as far away as Inverell, Broken Hill, Coonamble, Walgett and even South Australia.”

She said the flock prices had also been boosted by a relatively strong wool market.

“Wool prices have generally been good with my clients averaging $1500 a bale, despite wool quality being impacted by the drought, and now the immediate outlook for wool is positive.”

Allycia Bennett is the youth representative on the advisory panel for Leading Sheep. Leading Sheep is a joint initiative of Australian Wool Innovation and Department of Agriculture and Fisheries Queensland, with support from AgForce, which assists in decision-making about technologies and practices that can increase the profitability and productivity of Queensland sheep businesses.

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