

São Paulo Airport. "Hello, are you two bloody Kiwis?"
So said the first Brazilian met (after Dayanne). He worked in Aussie and NZ and recognized the jade pendant hanging about Dayanne's neck.

"Tell him (Robin), I'm ready to work for him." A 10 year old farm boy told Sergio Bôas.
He was serious.

"That guy (Robin) is not from Brazil. What Brazilian would walk in mud wearing sandals?"
So said a garage attendant when hosing Robin's legs and sandals. It is real mud which sets like concrete.

Jungle regenerates from fenced off areas at a great rate. Young vegetation needs to be removed quickly. I suggested a weed wiper could be useful and was surprised when Sergio said he knew about them. He then explained how they came out of the vegetation when it was dry and that they were very dangerous. Sergio was talking about vipers.



Texel sheep, close and personal. Paulo Schwab, Robin and Dayanne. Progeny are sold across Brazil. Rio Grande do Sul



Brazilian anacondas are big; but this one was huge. Instituto Butantã, São Paulo. (SP)



Dayanne's father: "Black coffee, no sugar? Yuk!"
Brazilians really do support their sugar cane industry.



OSRS presentation at Botucatu (130) and Piracicaba (30) Universities. Grand old coffee plantation buildings and wonderful, inquisitive students.



Fine food; fine people. BBQ lamb shoulder produced by Guilherme (RHS). Staff slice off pieces, then back it goes for more cooking. Shoulder meat is preferred above all else. Sorocaba, São Paulo



Research projects associated with the vet school were shown us. Horse stem cell cultures were fascinating. São Paulo State University, Botucatu, São Paulo

Article for OSRS Brazilian website, in Portuguese,
June 2011

I am a Kiwi 'Sheep Nutter'. This means I am a New Zealander (i.e Kiwi) and I am a madly enthusiastic sheep person (i.e 'sheep nutter').

This is a silly statement but to my delight, I found some similar people in Brazil. Yes, real 'sheep nutters'.

I've travelled widely and know about sheep performance and production in Scandinavia (Denmark, Norway and Finland), Germany, UK, Australia, Canada, South Africa, USA and now Brazil.

I've farmed sheep, cattle and deer for decades. I've exported my sheep genetics to New Guinea, Australia, Chile, USA and soon Uruguay, South Africa and Brazil.

I visited Brazil for three weeks in March-April this year. I was driven 8700 kms to farms and universities. I learned only two words of Portuguese: 'No', 'No'. These words stopped my generous hosts giving me more food and drink. It was so tempting, but I wished to be recognisable when I returned to NZ.

Learning about the Brazilian sheep industry was the purpose of my visit but I made other observations also.

Brazil is 30 times larger than NZ and has 45 people for each New Zealander. Brazil is beautiful, diverse and very exciting. NZ is tiny and diverse.

Colourful birds, reptiles and masses of wildlife was a constant delight. A camera made identification of insects, ants, snakes and spiders easily possible.

Although the world hears plenty about the destruction of Amazon rainforest, nobody writes about the vast areas closed off from stock along rivers, wetlands, through farms which make wildlife corridors and allow jungle to regenerate in huge volume. I tell people and show evidence in photos.

Brazilian rain can be very wet and heavy. Such huge rivers are an amazing asset and need all your respect. They are impressive and flow where needed for agriculture and cities.

Television with so many soap programmes and 'tele evangelism' channels was a surprise.

Brazilian graffiti is often as brilliant as it is horrible. Livening up blank walls in a flourish of colour it enhances many a drab area; while in others it makes them even more odious.

Whether the food be the humble roadside meal, restaurant cuisine or home cooking, it is wonderful. A mass of delicious taste, variety and mouth-watering smells. Brazilian food threatens visitors waist-lines. Meat cooked over hot coals would be some of the finest I've tasted.

No more food please!

Bitter and strong, your coffee is the 'best'. No sugar or milk for this Kiwi – just the raw taste. I horrified many of my hosts with my coffee preference.

Nowhere have I met better drivers than Brazilians. Whether they were in trucks or cars, they are the best. By indicating and swapping lanes at speed they help

move traffic. Courteous, fast and in small continental cars they zip from lane to lane like birds. Hardly a 'ding' was visible on cars.

Motorcycle couriers just have to be killed in numbers. Their skill is so dependent on other people's actions. Where else do couples look so elegant on tiny bikes careering to great speed between thirty metre trucks, vans and cars?

Brazilian road pot holes are deep. Always on the side you are driving (outside SP province), they are intimidating. Secondary roads become rivers in the wet. Although warned about poor roads, to drive 8702 kms in Brazil means one has experienced the roading hazards and I certainly have; I will never forget them.

It was a great pleasure to return to the academic world at the two universities Piracicaba and Botucatu. Professors haven't changed over the decades and their enthusiasm for their students is undiminished. Students still have the wide eyes and questioning minds of the next generation. The buildings of the old coffee farms add to the atmosphere of these two 'special' universities.

To the audiences Dayanne and I gave a brief view of NZ and sheep farming. Mingling with the students and pretending to understand questions was easy when Dayanne translated for me.

Visiting research staff at the universities and viewing their work was a highlight. My mind was a buzz of ideas from the time well spent. If one enjoys science, as I do, it doesn't take much to enjoy research projects like those we were shown.

But I did wonder why Botucatu had a flock of milking sheep when the future for sheep will always be meat production in Brazil...

I also visited the Instituto Butantan, saw the snakes (NZ has none) and spent time with a toxicologist. I am fascinated by snakes and spiders which I often capture in Mexico. No longer will I do so. Black widows and rattlers I will now stay away from, after speaking with this scientist who knew just how unwise I really was.

Now for sheep

Why, if sheepmeat is in undersupply and expensive in Brazil, is there not a thriving sheep industry?

"We need more lamb (meat); we can't get enough, we need it now" – Supermarket Manager, Porto Alegre.

"Customers would pay more for quality sheepmeat if it was available." – Botucatu store owner.

These points need addressing. With only 15 million sheep (NZ has 36m) it is not surprising that 90% of sheepmeat comes from Uruguay; there is no other source.

However the world trades only 1 million tonnes of sheepmeat across international borders annually; the world is short of sheepmeat and will be so forever.

The industry appears to not have focus. With such a huge home population, well marketed sheepmeat should be very profitable. There is no need to replace Uruguayan sheepmeat; just grow and package better product, market it well and attract a better price from the end user. Supply

only fresh or chilled sheepmeat.

Better genetics will give better product which maybe grown to specification. Consistency of supply is critical for profitable selling.

Promotion is wasted if supply is irregular. Most sheepmeat sellers complained about the inconsistency of supply and quality.

Visiting the huge sheep exhibition in Sao Paulo was a glimpse of NZ sheep shows forty years ago. Beautiful, huge, manicured sheep both black and white gathered ribbons and badges which made their owners proud.

NZ rams not only have to look good, they have to perform well. In NZ they have to mate with 100 ewes naturally. Progeny have to grow and reach targets greater than those achieved by their father.

To get this information young stock are constantly weighed and tested with all data being collated in computers. Breeding values for fertility, survival, growth etc are established and an index produced which ranks each ram amongst its siblings. It works.

Sale rams still have to look good but they can look good with masses of production data gathered from many years of recording. In spite of looking glorious in Sao Paulo no ram could be purchased by me because they all lack reliable performance records.

Out on the farms I learnt about how different breeds perform and saw various feeding regimes. Pastures and soils differ from those of NZ but the potential to grow sheep well was obvious. Sheep do not like long pasture, favouring shorter sweeter food. Brazil has lots of long pasture.

Much of what the NZ sheep industry does could be adapted to Brazilian conditions. Exchanging ideas about animal health issues and management would be a simple start. Suggestions, trials, comparisons and recording would be required with 'on farm' visits by vets, sheep consultants and ourselves. Everyone would benefit. Farmers would become 'sheep nutters' like us.

'On farm' changes need to be backed by processors. Processors must be part of this focus for the sheep industry. They will get better product, on time and in greater quantity. With supply consistency they can contract farmers and offer clear incentives for higher yielding cuts because they will be able to sell the processed cuts for more. Everybody wins. Better product, better supply, better returns and Uruguay lamb cannot compete.

I have to say thanks to those people who made the trip so stimulating for me: Sergio Villas Boas, Marlise Germer and Dayanne Almeida.

All of whom are already 'sheep nutters'. They understand what I said is possible in your fabulous country.

Final note.

1. I would love to own a few stretches of highway with lots of toll gates in a SP province.
2. **The sheep industry will be back in Brazil when it starts buying sugar cane country for sheep farming.**

Reflections...

Going back home was nostalgic. I wasn't quite sure about what I really missed until I was there again. It was nice to see some familiar faces and the taste of my mom's food. On the other hand, once back to Brazil I could realise how much NZ has changed my perspective about life.

Two years have passed, but some things were still the same. I felt like a foreigner in my own country even though I knew it would be just an 'adapting' time. Stress, rush and queues. It was really hard to get back to that 'world'.

Travelling through the same roads that led me to where I am now, was like living a dream. A lot to say; a lot to question; a lot to be done. I always thought that 'respect' had to do with your age. Suddenly, I was given the chance to speak to people who were completely absorbed by my words as if it has never happened before. They were there to listen to what I had to say and to congratulate me for how far I had come. So now I know that 'respect' comes with experience, NZ experience.

The beauty of being outside of our own 'bubble' is that you can see the whole picture. Therefore, you can point out mistakes quite quickly but better than that you can see solutions which are obvious to your eyes. Finally I was able to build up my own opinion and stick with it without any fear.

Bringing Robin into my 'world' was quite a tricky but important task. We had 20 days to make the most of it in a place of 8 million km². I tried to organize myself, as sheep farmers in Brazil do not actually live on their farms. But in the end we worked it out and Robin was shown the different sides of our sheep industry. I was happy that he could see through his own eyes what words can't express most times.

We met sheep farmers, agriculture consultants and academics, vets, sheep enthusiasts as well as sheep industry workers. We went from the top centre of Brazil to the south boundary with Uruguay. That was a marathon. The day time seemed to not to be sufficient and getting some sleep was a luxury. I knew Robin wished badly to be able to speak Portuguese as the long sheep conversations went on and on but somehow we were all still speaking the same language: meat production.

It was my first great opportunity to introduce Robin, who represents NZ in its best, to the people with whom I had spent my sheep farming apprenticeship for the past 6 years; the same people I knew that believe in an efficient sheep industry in Brazil as I do.

By the end of our journey I was sure that many of the people we met gained a 'push up' and confidence about what they could do for their own business and, in doing so, contribute to the country's economy in order to become more competitive.

Robin's visit is still being commented upon by those who had the opportunity to meet him and they spread his words. But they still don't believe how young Robin looks.
Dayanne Almeida, July 2011



Texels first arrived from Europe in 1974; more have been imported annually. Without performance recording the breed has made little progress. Texel meat is superior sheepmeat. Rio Grande do Sul



Stone walls were built for Brazil's defence when fighting territorial wars with Uruguay and Paraguay. Now, these old enemies have a common interest; sheep.



International lunch. Brazilians, Uruguayans, Paraguayans and a Kiwi. Dayanne's unplanned presentation was riveting. Only rain could be heard as she spoke. Questions were probing. David Martins, Rio Grande do Sul



Zebu and European cross cattle. Irrigated pasture produces 60 tonnes of dry matter per hectare, per annum. Sao Paulo



Texel ewes, synchronized and about to be artificially mated with fresh semen from expensive Texel rams. Farm inseminators are paid a bonus for good conception rates. David Martins, Rio Grande do Sul

"What is good for NZ sheep farming is not necessarily so for Brazil." Brazilian sheep farmer

The principles of sheep farming are identical everywhere, it is only their application that differs. Much of what is good in NZ e.g. scanning, yield grading, performance recording, grazing management, contract stock growing etc would be good for Brazil.

Great coffee plantations were chopped into small farms, too small for cattle but economic for sheep. Farms in São Paulo State average 70 ha today. Factories producing sugar lease any available land, owners move to cities already bursting with people.

Urbanization is harsh for rural migrants.

Farm labour costs:

Workers earn \$9600/yr (or "90 lambs/year") Manager \$14400/yr

Veterinary earnings:

Straight out of Vet School \$28800/yr

Established owner of a practice \$153000/yr

"We need more lamb meat; we can't get enough. We need it now."

Jau Supermercado, Botucatu, Leg \$58.90/Kg Zaffari, Porto Alegre, Rack \$34.42/kg

Night security in Mairinque (Dayanne's home town) consists of a policeman, a scooter, lights and a huge hooter. 'Baddies' are given plenty of time to vamoosh! Honking and flashing of lights start at 1am on the village streets.

"Nobody asks about performance. Clients only ask about the prizes my stock have won." South Brazilian ram breeder

Predators cause considerable stock losses in Brazil. Two-legged predators (humans) are the worst.



Robin and Sergio Bôas discussing the merits of lambs ready for market. Lambs were weaned at 60 days old then fed concentrates until 42 kg LW. Sold for \$170 each.



Robin with Clive Dalton. Clive's mischievous grin and verbal eloquence did much to shape NZ's sheep culture of the 1970-80's. Direct and correct he inspired many farmers. Hamilton, Sept 2010

Hill country musings By Dr Clive Dalton

Looking back, what disappoints me most is the way researchers and their funders deserted hill country farmers about 20 years ago. When things went bad, AgResearch should have put together a 'task force' to get immediate help to farmers, and the Minister should have led the charge.

The CRIs were invented, the money went to 'blue sky' projects, and the end was nigh. They hired bureaucrats with fancy Power Point presentations in corporate code to convince themselves that this was 'progress' and would lead to profits for their stakeholders (the taxpayers). Common sense went out the window.

There was plenty of research in the can that could have been dug out. At Ruakura in the 1980s an economist Grant Scobie arrived, and worked out that there was an 80% return on investment in research, BUT, it had a 12-year lag.

Now that's four NZ governments – so when one switched the money off, nobody noticed and they even got a 'Good Dog' response from the bureaucrats, when they should have had a "Get outside" command, accompanied by a well-aimed rock. So the recent money put up for research as a "big deal" is only money a previous government switched off.

I've got to the stage now that if and when, I see a "research breakthrough" in the media, I first check to see who has sponsored the research or who AgResearch has been in bed with! The failure of some recent new pasture species is a good example.

Sheep research is in a parlous state, and despite the Prime Minister's occasional recognition of the importance of agriculture, and cries for innovation and new ideas, there is nowhere anybody with ideas can go to get them tested which is independent, and wouldn't rob you to pay for the work, or pinch your IP into the bargain.

We once had the world's two best sheep academics (Rae and Coop) with all their post-grad students. There were at least 20 of us scientists working on sheep, supported by Animal Husbandry Advisors and the Sheep and Beef Officers in each region. Who is out there now? Nobody. The 'commercialisation' of MAF killed this – again under the heading of progress.

It will probably take another decade at least, for any interest in sheep farmer's needs, when this lots of

dwindling researchers and their bureaucratic minders have moved on. By this time the fallacy of turning our plains and many of our hills into dairy farms will have become apparent through environmental damage and exhausted water reserves, and the realization that sheep are the only animal that can handle low fertility soils and water restricted environments.

The research targets are easy to see:

1. Get the costs out of sheep, which means getting rid of anything has a physical impact on the human. Genetics has to lead the charge to do this.
2. Rescue what's left of the hills to farm them with greater concern for the environment and the welfare of the stock.
3. What can't be rescued put into forestry for carbon credits.

With the Prime Minister a successful ex currency buyer (i.e. gambler) and the Minister of Agriculture at about Number 13 in the pecking order, I'm not holding my breath.



Native Santa Ines ewes and a terminal sire. March, Mato Grosso do Sul



A 'reasonable' presentation. All the quality sheepmeat (Texel, Dorper) is never on display, being put aside for affluent customers. Boned leg \$25.52/kg. Zaffari Hypermarket, Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul



Horses are preferred transport on most stock farms. A bee stung Robin's horse which momentarily became a bronco.
Robin and Sergio Faria (Businessman/farmer), Minas Gerais



Dr Sergio Bôas (consultant), Tomé Arantes (farmer, owner), Robin. Trips around farms worldwide are similar but in Brazil they are especially bumpy. So much to see, your neck gets sore.



This flock provides coloured wool for a thriving home-weaving business. Lamb meat processed on the farm, is sold to a restaurant. Thieves regularly take sheep. "Well, they are hungry" said the police.
Marco and Denise Righi, Rio Grande do Sul



"I'll answer all questions about sheep management as I can speak perfect english". So said the guy beside Robin, in Portuguese. Sergio Faria's enthusiastic farm staff.



Long, lean lambs, one with a buzzard on the brain. Rank pasture is not nutritious. Brazil has lots of rank pasture.



Eucalypts for heating, cooking and timber. Plantation wood feeds furnaces for drying grain. Rice earns \$20/60kg; it is uneconomic to grow.



Lacaune ewes, a French milking breed, grazing behind electric wires. Brazil's only commercial sheep flock producing cheeses. Porto Alegre



Graffiti. Sometimes spectacular; often atrocious. School wall.
Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul



Martinho Ferreira applied his business acumen to sheep farming. These good sheep were all AI'd. Labour is cheap.
Arandu, São Paulo



Dogs taking their owners for 'walkies'. Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul



São Paulo grows and grows, 70 kms long; high rise and low rise homes, it is a scary place. All food has to hauled in for the 20 million people.



Motorcycles weave through São Paulo traffic. Fast. Skilful. Survival is in the hands of others.



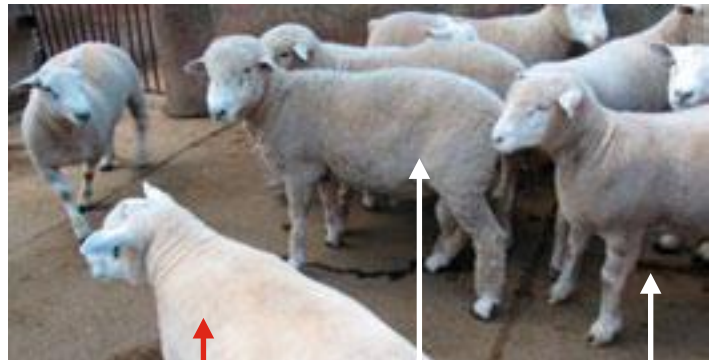
Dr Lucas Bachega of Marfrig (meat processor) engrossed in the OSRS booklet, written in Portuguese. São Paulo



Sheep night pens protect ewes from 'lions', give shelter from sun and are where concentrates are fed. Lambs creep feed from pens too.



Sheep, obesity. Rams reared on concentrates could not survive in the wild. Dorpers or Texels rams? São Paulo Sheep Show



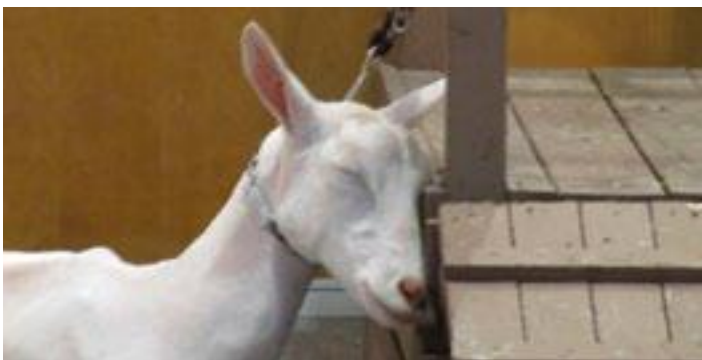
Sale rams. Texels sell for US\$9000, Corriedales for US\$4000, Ile de France for US\$3000. Paulo Schwab, Rio Grande do Sul



Beauty show. 'Stud' sheep auction prices reflect their show ring success. No performance records.



Panic. A ram is showing interest in a tethered dorper ewe at a sheep beauty saloon. São Paulo Sheep Show



Groomed stock are used to halters. When bored, stock go to sleep.



Farms are required to fence off 40% of their land to foster regeneration. Brazil has trees everywhere; large wildlife corridors.



Brazil has massive rivers because coastal alps turn their rain water inland to meet water flowing from the Andes. Rivers contribute to the economic wealth of Brazil. *Rio Jacui*



Many secondary roads become rivers regularly. *Mato Grosso do Sul*



A suspension bridge was all cables, concrete and elegance.



Weaving along 70 kms of road was bad enough but it was repeated, three days later. *Mato Grosso do Sul*



A tractor sent to tow us through the mud, bogged. A second tractor towed us to freedom. Mud sets like concrete if not washed off.



Immense, bone-shaking holes in sealed highways. Drivers dodge holes and drive on both sides of the road. *Minas Gerais*



Motels are places where couples enjoy privacy in 'theme' rooms, so fantasies may be played out. Each room is tidied between visits in only 16 minutes. Motels are discrete and necessary in a nation with crowded living conditions. **Brazilian visitors are 'staggered' at the number of NZ motels.**

Texel Marketing Group (TMG) and OSRS plan activities very seriously.

Chris Southgate (TMG) and Robin Hilson (TMG & OSRS) have spent weeks offshore checking processing facilities, establishing supply chains and exploring huge genetic projects.

Many "opportunities" investigated were not developed because they did not put money in farmer's pockets.

TMG is experienced at these tasks, is thorough and good at making "things" happen. TMG will never commit farmers until it is totally confident.

Exporting meat and wool using personal capital is an experience known by few farmers. It is tough business, TMG/OSRS knows.



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