



# An International Experience

*When she was just 17, Rosie Douglas left her family's Hereford farm to travel and experience agriculture all around the world.*

by *Bridget Beran*



Though sending your child on a yearlong journey around the world may seem like every parent's nightmare, for the Douglas family, it was the perfect fit. After Rosie Douglas finished her final year of high school in 2013, she decided to take a skip year and left her family's Hereford farm in Mains of Aires, Scotland, to see agriculture in the rest of the world.

"I was young for my year and still not entirely sure what I wanted to do at university, so I thought it was a good idea to travel before I started university and a career," Rosie explains. "I have always loved traveling. It was a big adventure leaving home at 17 and not really knowing what to expect, but it was worth every minute."

This wasn't a new concept for the Douglas family as Rosie's father, John, had also taken a skip year to work before he completed a two-year agricultural program at the West of Scotland Agricultural College.

"At 17 years I was too young and without any management experience to benefit from the management and business part of the course," John says. "I want all our four daughters to travel and pick up alternative views and methods so that whatever they study they can identify the most relevant lessons from their training for their future occupation."

After a school trip to see agriculture in northern Scotland, Rosie returned and told

her family she wanted to pursue a career in agriculture. She had learned the world's population was growing and she wanted to make sure people were fed. Her father said she wouldn't be able to feed the whole world on just Hereford beef, so she better learn about other aspects of the production agriculture industry.

### American adventures

The first stop on Rosie's journey was B&D Herefords, Claflin, Kan., a Line One Hereford operation. This was an ideal choice for her dad, who had been exclusively using American Line One Hereford genetics in the Douglasses' herd since 2005.

After meeting Craig and Gerald Beran Jr. at the National Western Stock Show, Rosie and the Berans became good friends, and Rosie stayed with Craig's family during her time in America. The Douglas family's farm, Ervie Herefords, had previously purchased embryos from B&D Herefords, so Rosie was able to see the herd from which some of their calves had originated.

Because her three-month stay in the U.S. overlapped with the American Royal, she was able to attend the American Hereford Association Annual Meeting with the Beran family and to help on a showing and fitting crew with John Herbel for the weekend.

She also had the opportunity to make a 14-hour drive with Craig and Junior to Holden Herefords female sale in Valier, Mont., where some of their other genetics originate. Rosie says this trip was one of her favorite memories, along with family barbecues, attending Kansas State University (K-State) football games and discovering Reese's peanut butter cups.



Rosie (r) and her sister, Olivia (l), are pictured in Kansas in summer 2015.

Also, while in Kansas, Rosie visited K-State and sat in on classes for a week. This experience helped her decide to continue her education in the U.S.

"My trip to the states in 2013 was amazing and a real eye-opener," Rosie says. "Everyone I met was so welcoming. The livestock operation systems were impressive and it was refreshing to see such a positive outlook for the agricultural industry. It also seems to me that the universities in America have a lot of funding for agricultural based research."

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While in Kansas, Rosie immersed herself in American agriculture and worked like a member of the family at B&D Herefords.

After a visit to South Dakota in 2015, she decided to continue her schooling at South Dakota State University and to study range science. She started school there in August 2015.

"I chose this program because it incorporates livestock management and pasture care. It also ties in the importance of sustainability and ecology, which I believe in this day and age is an important issue for any business or institution," Rosie explains. "I really liked the university and the town of Brookings. The university has great facilities and I have a chance to study a subject I feel passionate about."

### Globetrotting

John joined her for the last part of her time in Kansas and flew with her to Uruguay, where she would stay for a month. She stayed with Enrique and Patricia Larraechea, friends of her parents and her maternal grandparents, for part of her trip.

Jimmy Basson, her maternal grandfather, met the Larraecheas when the World Hereford Conference was hosted in South Africa, and they've been good friends ever since. She also stayed with Nicolas Clement and his family for a while. Nicolas

worked for John for six months while Nicolas was pursuing his graduate degree in agronomy. While in Uruguay, she also stayed with Pedro Arocena and his family. Much like Nicolas, Pedro worked for John when Pedro was young.

Pedro showed Rosie around the sites of Colonia, Uruguay. Some of her favorite memories included the beaches and costal views at Punta del Este and watching a team of men shearing Romney sheep in their bare feet while she was at the Larraechea's. Her family also raises sheep, so Rosie visited

several sheep stations while on her journey.

From Uruguay, Rosie flew 27 hours to Perth, Australia. She stayed with the House family, cousins of her grandparents, and says she loved working with their sheep in the heat with Annabel House and their trusty dog named Pig. Rosie also got to help lead a convoy of grain bins and combine harvesters down the highway. Another highlight of her trip was learning how to surf at Ocean Beach, Denmark, Australia. After working for two weeks on the sheep station near Kojunup, she spent Christmas with her grandparents who live in Perth. In a big change from Christmas in



One of Rosie's favorite memories from her time in Uruguay was watching men shearing sheep.

## Experience with Ervie

In all her travels, Rosie Douglas, Mains of Aires, Scotland, says the experience from her own ranch stayed with her. While every farm she visited had its great aspects, nothing quite compared to home. Her family's farm, Ervie Herefords, runs about 180 American Line One Herefords as its main focus with a few Aberdeen Angus cows, as well as 40 registered Texel and 350 commercial Romney sheep. While the Douglases also have a couple of horses for work, John, her father, laughs that they've yet to sell one.

"The scale of livestock and arable farms is much less extensive to those you would see elsewhere," Rosie explains. "We cannot compete on an international level in terms of production output due to our high input costs and agricultural policies that we have to comply with. There are a number of branding schemes e.g. Scotch Quality Beef and Lamb that

aim to sell produce to a premium niche market which gives livestock farmers like ourselves a better price."

When she was 9 years old, Rosie showed her first heifer, Ervie Peach, and continued to show with her younger sisters until she graduated from high school. The Douglas family has been farming at Mains of Aires since John's grandfather, also John Douglas, bought the estate in 1929. Though the farm had a large dairy, with pigs and potatoes as secondary enterprises, John's grandfather also became involved in sheep production.

### Farming families

Rosie's grandfather, John Telfer Douglas, then took over the farm and established Ervie Herefords in 1969, while the Hereford breed was at its height of popularity in Scotland. Rosie's parents, John Douglas and Alexandra Basson,

both from Hereford farm families, married in 1993 while the Hereford breed was in a low point of commercial popularity in the United Kingdom. Alexandra's parents ran the successful Wye Not Hereford Farm in South Africa.

"It was at Avalon I saw the impact American Hereford genetics were having and became determined to source the same bloodlines for our Ervie herd," John explains. "On the outset of the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) beef crisis in Britain, Alexandra and I decided to disperse our commercial cross-bred beef cows and expand our pedigree Hereford herd in an attempt to isolate us from the dreaded disease. To make this a success we had to improve our marketing and also focus entirely on input costs and profit. To this end we're still hanging in there."

Following the example of their fathers, who were both enthusiastic

much colder Scotland, she recalls having a barbecue on the beach with her grandparents and cousins in Australia. Following the holidays, she moved on to South Africa.

This was an extra special portion of the trip because Rosie's maternal grandparents raised Herefords there and her mother grew up in the area. She stayed with Lisa Amm, a former classmate of her mother's, and her family at Alpha Estates, Ladybrand, South Africa. The fruit orchards, impressive Free State thunder storms and the Alpha Appaloosa horses all were a part of making her stay in South Africa special.

"They had a stone walled swimming pool which served as a good way to cool down after a long horse ride," Rosie says. "And I loved helping to milk and making cheese with Lisa."

While spending many months traveling around the world was certainly a lot of fun, the lessons Rosie learned from her international experience have widened her views of agriculture and exposed her to a multitude of different ways of doing things. She worked at home for seven months before starting to study agriculture in Edinburgh, Scotland, and John says her experience showed.

"She was constantly relating to her work and observations on all the places she had visited and comparing and discussing our differences and similarities," John says. "I think her travels opened her mind and made her constantly look for ways we could tweak the way we go about our farming



Rosie's time in South Africa proved to be a special time because her mother grew up there. She stayed with a family friend who had fruit orchards and Appaloosa horses.

chores. It also made me justify my reasons for the way I farm and the choices and decisions I make. Fortunately I am generally quite stubborn when it comes to change and given time I usually could come up with a reason."

He adds that all farming operations Rosie experienced were quite different from one another, but each was very successful in its particular field. "Our plan was that it would broaden her outlook and allow her to decide what interested and inspired her most."

However, Rosie says there were also some things about the agriculture industry that seem universal.

"Forgetting the different climates, topographies, economies and just ways of doing things every place I visited showed that farmers and ranchers all share a love, a passion and determination for agriculture whether it be cattle or crops, horses or vegetables," Rosie says. **HW**

Hereford breeders, John says it was an easy decision for them to continue breeding Hereford cattle.

"Herefords are hardy and suit the grazing on the west of Britain better than most other beef breeds and require lower inputs than many," John says. "Growing up with them I firstly became keen on showing them in order to promote our sale bulls. Nowadays it is improving the natural performance and consistency of our herd, which is my chief objective and sales tool."

### Scottish similarities

Though the Douglases have incorporated a lot of American Hereford genetics, there are still differences between Scottish agriculture and American agriculture. With far fewer acres, Scottish farms are still able to be very productive due to the temperate climate. John says the smaller scale of

family farms is the biggest difference he has found. Their farm sits at sea level, and while their fields can be exposed to Atlantic storms and can have a rainfall up to 60 inches a year, the climate is fairly mild and makes for easy winters. In Scotland excess rain is a common problem, and their fields all have an underground drainage system. John explains that they also usually winter their cattle on kale, stubble or in outdoor concrete corrals with straw areas to lie on.

However, John, who has traveled to South Africa, Canada, Australia and the U.S., says there are far more similarities than differences. In fact, his trip to Kansas reminded him greatly of the U.K. But the regulations and restrictions put on Scottish agriculture present their own set of challenges.

"We're operating in a lower league in comparison to the volume and diversity of agricultural output. Having

said that, it is my opinion that we would be much more competitive and productive if our focus was purely on our farming business without the distortions to our market from the Common Agricultural Policy emanating from Brussels with its increasingly difficult compliance rules and regulations," John explains.

While Scottish agriculture may vary from American agriculture, Rosie says there are some old traditions that she holds dear, especially at the sale barn.

"I do enjoy some of the old farming traditions that you can still see today especially at the cattle auctions; the pedigree cattle are sold in guineas (a former British coin worth 21 shillings £1.05) instead of pounds," Rosie explains. "Also the person selling is expected to give the buyer some luck penny (money back) as a good luck token." **HW**