

Young Achievers – Kayla Kopp & Friends

Put four country girls together, set them a challenge and what you get is winners. Charles Sturt University students demonstrated the future of the sheep and wool industry is in good hands by taking out the team event at the National Merino Challenge recently held in Adelaide.

Charles Sturt University took 22 students to Adelaide recently to compete in the National Merino Challenge to showcase their talents in the Merino and wool industry. Students trained prior to the challenge in order to boost their knowledge, with some students prior to training having never worked with Merino sheep but all willing to learn and engage with people in the industry. The winning team of Kayla Kopp, Peak Hill; Nyssa Belton-Liddy, Koonoomoo; Brooke Cowan, Blayney and Zoe Lynch, Cooma demonstrated that understanding sheep and wool proved to be a winning tool. Nyssa was also awarded third overall in the tertiary section and top performer in the wool section.

As a member of the team the ability to use my knowledge learnt at University, from experts in the wool industry and on my families property demonstrated the vast variety of knowledge that is required in challenges like this. The challenge required us to compete in mini challenges over two days. These challenges included wool typing, nutrition calculations, condition scoring, picking animals based on ASBVs and also picking sires based on a producers breeding objective. The Merino Challenge was an experience that I will never forget, which allowed me to engage with leaders in the industry. Students also had the opportunity to listen to people within the industry which gave insights into careers and how they managed to set themselves up within the agricultural industry. This was an exciting time allowing me to meet others who had grown up with similar interests to me. It was a fun enjoyable experience allowing professional networks to be made and also to help younger students with the importance a degree has as you venture out into the workforce.

From an early age I had always had a keen interest in livestock production. Growing up on my families Merino Stud, Towalba in Peak Hill central west NSW I was always surrounded by sheep and wool. Growing up on a sheep farm I know I was lucky but I believe this just further cemented in my mind that the agriculture industry was for me. Upon finishing school I chose to attend Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga to study a Bachelor of Animal Science – possibly one of the best moves that I have made.

University allowed my knowledge of the livestock industry to expand to not just understand the on-farm aspects but the entire chain of production to the consumer. Last year I competed in the Intercollegiate Meat Judging where I was lucky enough to come first in lamb judging overall, again strengthening in my mind that sheep meat, wool and production was where I would continue my studies. This has led to me completing my honours year at home on the farm running a project on twin merino lamb survival – where I have the best of both worlds on the farm and also increasing my knowledge through university. This is what led me to attend the National Merino Challenge which is one of the greatest opportunities I have had in the Merino industry, allowing me to meet a variety of people which has led me to believe the future of the merino and wool industry is in very capable hands heading into the future. To anyone who is thinking about doing the Merino Challenge next year, go for it, it is an amazing unforgettable experience and you never know what opportunities may arise in the future.

