

## **LANDCARE EXPRESS**

**Reporter:** Sean Murphy

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SALLY SARA: Well last week, I spoke with Landcare boss Brian Scarsbrick about a survey which revealed a disturbing lack of understanding by city people of what happens on a farm. The Landcare organisation decided one way of getting the farming and Landcare message to the city was to actually take some urban dwellers to a working farm, and they did this by hiring a train out of Sydney's Central Station. Also on board was Landline reporter Sean Murphy.

SEAN MURPHY: All aboard the Landcare Express, a chartered trip to Tarago in the NSW Southern Tablelands for 100 city slickers. As part of Landcare Week, these mostly young families won their journey of discovery in a radio competition.

FIONA SHAW: I just think it's really important that people from the city do understand the hardships and the actual workings and all the work that does actually go into the produce that makes it from the farm to our tables. So yeah, I think it's a really great idea what's going on today.

PETER GRAHAM: I think it's a really good opportunity for the children to learn about outside the metropolitan area.

SEAN MURPHY: Have they ever visited a farm before?

PETER GRAHAM: No. I have, but the children haven't.

SEAN MURPHY: So what are you expecting?

PETER GRAHAM: I'm expecting quite a lot, even stuff that I haven't learned, particularly in the environmental side of farming.

SEAN MURPHY: Our destination is Willeroo, a 2,000-hectare cattle farm running just short of 600 breeding cows. It's in the Lake George Basin, a closed catchment, where every drop of its 700mm annual rainfall is carefully managed to balance productivity and a healthy environment. The ethos here, though, is about more than just sustainability.

GEORGE GUNDRY: We need actually to be doing better than sustaining what we do - we need to be actually improving it and leaving it better. I mean, there be people who say to me, "Well, maybe we can afford to more than others" or those sort of things, but we can't afford possibly NOT to do it if you want to leave a legacy of healthy land.

SEAN MURPHY: With rain threatening, a tractor ride sets the scene for a day of fun. But this visit is also driving a serious message.

BRIAN SCARSBRICK: I think the important thing here is, we've got to get back to our cultural root, our culture heritage, and that is the land. The more we move away from that, the more difficulties we have about really supporting the farming community out here. They produce clean, green produce at a very reasonable price, and what we're saying here is, "Come and have a look at how they do it." Landcare farming is all about adopting more sustainable agricultural practices, and that's what's happening out here. We'd like to showcase that today.

FARMER: So you go like that and then straight into the hole, and then what you do is you've got to backfill all the soil in around the seedling.

SEAN MURPHY: An estimated 20 billion native trees have been removed from Australia's landscape since Captain Cook's arrival in 1770. Across the country, more than 4,000 Landcare groups - mostly spearheaded by farmers - are reversing the trend. Farmers are now planting tens of millions of trees a year for conservation. And for the city visitors, battling the breeze and getting with the Landcare program offers a rare hands-on connection with the land.

What do you hope the kids get out of today?

TONY BARNES: Um, just to get a bit of an idea that there's two sides of life - there is a rural life and a city life, yeah.

SEAN MURPHY: At Willeroo, trees are part of a holistic management approach.

GEORGE GUNDRY: Well, I call myself an environmental dermatologist because I really care for the skin of the soil surface, which protects the planet from the ravages of sunlight and evaporation, and wind and things like that. I'm a soil surface manager. I used to think I was a regenerative tree producer but

now I've got to down to basics, you know - looking after the water cycle and maintaining a good leaf area on plants so we can harvest lots of sunlight - free sunlight.

SEAN MURPHY: George Gundry believes global warming is forcing farmers to better understand water in order to survive more and longer periods of drought.

GEORGE GUNDRY: Maybe they will get worse if climate change is the case, although if climate change is anything like this, bring it on! (Laughs)

SEAN MURPHY: Yeah, actually, this is the sound of money, isn't it?

GEORGE GUNDRY: It is indeed, yeah. And also, money - watching money go down a creek into the lake, watching water going down the creek into the lake is money getting off the place. Because the opportunity to grow biological capital in the soil with the rainfall is what we look for in any of our opportunities, so if the rainfall is going to become less, we'll make use of what little we get. I do use the saying, you know, "You can increase your rainfall." People say "Huh?" But actually, what I really mean is it increases the effectiveness of your rainfall.

FARMER: The big tummy, which is not like ours at all, is full of bugs and who knows what those bugs do? They digest the grass. So when your mum tries to give you too much salad, you say, "I haven't got four tummies, mum, I can't digest all of this! Give me meat!" Is that right? LAUGHTER

SEAN MURPHY: The humour might be wet, but the rain is only temporary, and George Gundry's daughter Helen gives a demonstration on handling cattle. It's all about respect - respecting their space, and working with them.

HELEN GUNDRY: The more you move closer to them, the more you'll get movement out of that animal. So if you can use that technique by going in and out of the flight zone, you can potentially manipulate these cattle to move where you want to go.

SEAN MURPHY: Meat and Livestock Australia and the cattle breeders of Australia joined forces to support today's visit. They're keen to reverse the lack of understanding apparent in Landcare's recent survey, with most city dwellers having no idea what happens on farms.

DAVID PALMER: This is just a great opportunity to bridge that divide that is between city and country. For the city people to understand about how land and water is managed and utilised, how food is produced, and equally for country people to get a bit of an appreciation of what motivates and what interests city people.

GEORGE GUNDRY: Do you live in a low stressful way and you approach them with respect, you can put them where you want, hold them where you want, but benefit the land.

SEAN MURPHY: George Gundry's passion for Landcare farming is obvious, but he admits farmers are having a hard time getting their story told.

GEORGE GUNDRY: It may be the fact that a lot of publicity is to do with the downside of droughts and the misery that they do cause. And the sights that tug the heartstrings perhaps on the TV are of a barren landscape, dust blowing in the wind and starving animals. That maybe conveys a message to city people that farmers are reckless or poor managers, and that's not true. I believe that people do do their best by their land and their livestock.

SEAN MURPHY: According to some, it's because the Green movement is dominating the conservation agenda and portraying farmers as exploiters.

ALBY SCHULTZ: The Green movement has been very, very professional in terms of clouding the issues about the real contributions made by rural and regional Australians right across the country. In their agenda to discredit farming practices and to discredit the lifestyle of farmers in rural and regional Australia they have given the urban-based cousins of those rural-based people the wrong story about what farming's about and what a significant contribution farmers themselves are making to protecting the environment that we live in.

SEAN MURPHY: Meat and Livestock Australia has pledged \$1 million from its recent increase to the growers' levy to run more programs such as today's on-farm visit. It's backing Landcare's "softly, softly" approach but understands why some producers are supporting the NSW Farmers' Association's more aggressive "Get off our backs!" campaign.

DAVID PALMER: Well, I think we have got to be a bit sympathetic. The farmers around Australia - and in some places more than others - are finding their terms of trade being impinged and impacted more and more through government regulation and other matters. So the New South Wales farmers as a lobby group, as a pressure group to put pressure on government for reform, has a legitimate role to play. However, the role that's being played here today is a little different. Today's role is about having city people becoming attached, building a bridge to rural Australia, to the farming side of it, about how farmers manage their soil, manage their land and water, manage their cattle, producing food at affordable prices consistently year round for our city folk to consume good, safe, wholesome product that Australia produces. So everyone's got a role.

SEAN MURPHY: Back on the Landcare Express, bound for home in Sydney with a new appreciation of modern farming and of life beyond the Great Divide.

TONY BARNES: I think I learned a lot, particularly that water is a very important part of the environment for the farming industry and the methods that they're using to manage it is quite interesting.

MEGAN BARNES: Just for the kids, to see how much enjoyment that they got out of today, especially on Father's Day, such a special day for them, um, yeah.

SEAN MURPHY: So you'd recommend that any city family should have a visit to a...

MEGAN BARNES: Oh, for sure. I've even suggested that the kids should go back for a week next year to see how the plants have gone. What do you think?

FARM FACT: The Landcare movement includes 40% of Australia's farmers who manage 60% of the land and 70% of the nation's diverted water.

SALLY SARA: Sean Murphy on board the Landcare train.



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