

BEEF IN A BIG WAY DOWN UNDER

By Gordon Collie, President, Australian Council of Agricultural Journalists



In the Australian outback, they do beef on a grand scale. Take the Holmes a Court family who own eight cattle stations trading as Heytesbury Beef. Their spread covers 33,000 square km - comfortably bigger than Belgium. They run 230,000 cattle, turning off 50,000 each year, a big percentage of which are shipped live into the markets of Southeast Asia.

Youthful chief executive Paul Holmes a Court addressed more than 300 people attending a Queensland Rural Press Club function in the Australian beef 'capital', Rockhampton, in May. The central Queensland city was hosting Beef 2006, a week-long international celebration which has become the biggest specialist event of its type in the Southern Hemisphere.



South American beef producers were also out in force to attend the Third World Braford Congress. Tropically adapted Braford genetics are helping drive the emerging beef superpowers Brazil and Argentina. Beef 2006 showcased clever technology which is helping to transform beef production in Australia.

IT specialist Simon Holmes a Court shared the Rural Press Club podium with his brother to give a glimpse of the virtual future where solar-powered telemetry uses an array of gadgetry to remotely monitor the vast open spaces. Heytesbury has joined with the beef industry in funding a \$5 million research project on one of its Northern Territory properties, Pigeon Hole, to prove the technology can replace hard-to-get cowhands.

Cameras monitor pasture, check that vital water bores are working and that fences are not damaged by kangaroos. Radio tracking collars give an accurate fix on cattle movement across the vast inland plains via satellite. The Holmes a Court brothers believe the new technology can lead to a doubling in beef production without degrading the fragile outback environment.

Above: Simon Holmes a Court talking about remote IT for the Outback at the Queensland Rural Press Club gathering in Rockhampton last month.