

LOVES COMING TO WORK

Michelle Stewart says she loves coming to work every day, which is just as well for everybody at Tongala because her main job is looking after the payroll!

In addition she handles the daily administration relating to all cattle bought through the network of liveweight buying centres, and sits in for Bernie Tinning when she is on leave.

It is part of the multi-skilling that the tight knit office team takes so much pride in.

Michelle has been with Greenham for eight years following a 20 year stint with Sun Rice in Echuca where she also handled the payroll.

Over that time she has seen many changes in office administration as manual systems have given way to the automation of the IT age.

She describes Peter Greenham as a wonderful man to work for and says she has been very fortunate to always have bosses she could respect.

"That's not to say they haven't been demanding, but that's never a problem when you can respect them."

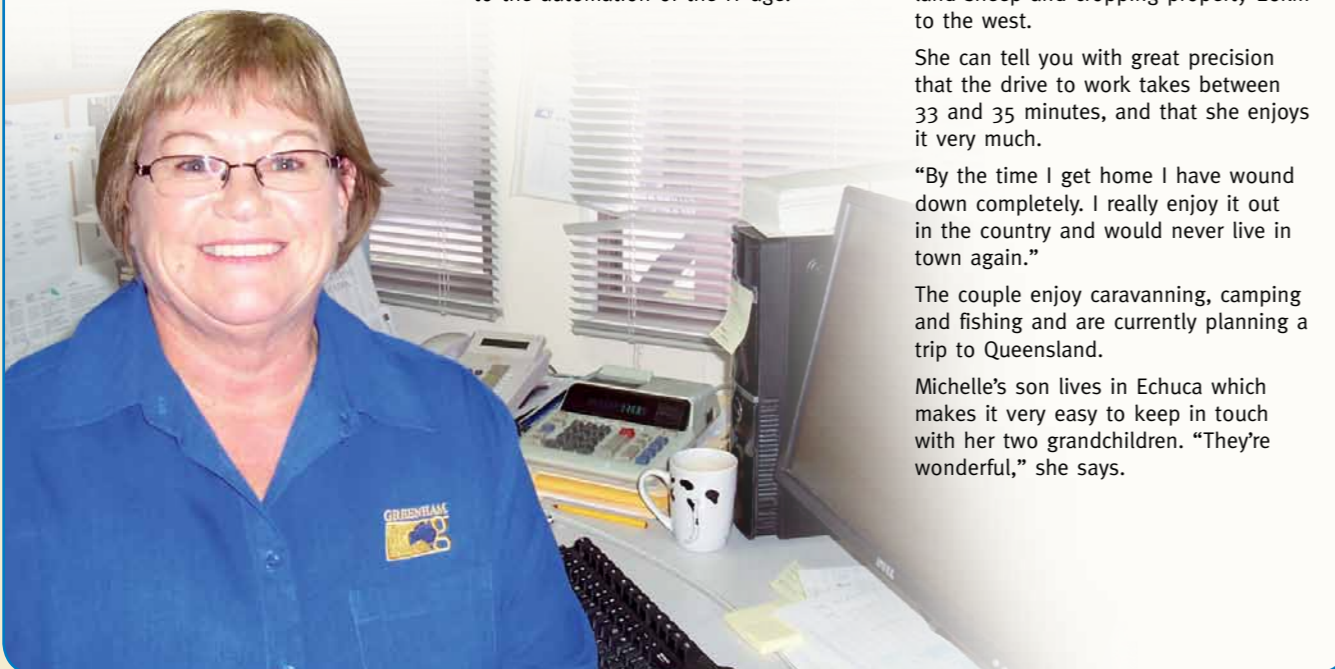
Echuca born and bred and having spent most of her life in the town, she now lives with her partner Geoff on a dry land sheep and cropping property 20km to the west.

She can tell you with great precision that the drive to work takes between 33 and 35 minutes, and that she enjoys it very much.

"By the time I get home I have wound down completely. I really enjoy it out in the country and would never live in town again."

The couple enjoy caravanning, camping and fishing and are currently planning a trip to Queensland.

Michelle's son lives in Echuca which makes it very easy to keep in touch with her two grandchildren. "They're wonderful," she says.



FERTILISERS AND INSECTICIDES CAN BE LETHAL

There are more than 40,000 chemicals approved for use in Australia, some of which are used in the agricultural industry to assist with growing and maintaining crops.

However, some of these chemicals, such as hydrogen peroxide, potassium nitrate, potassium chlorate and nitric acid, can be used to make home-made explosives.

In recent years, common chemicals have been successfully used by terrorists around the world to manufacture illegal bombs which have resulted in damage to property, mass casualties and fatalities.

For example, in Mumbai in 2006, terrorists attacked the suburban railway using bombs made from a chemical commonly used in fertiliser.

Investigations into previous terrorist activities around the world have shown it is common for terrorists to stockpile fertiliser.

In England in April, 2007, five men were found guilty of conspiring to cause explosions likely to endanger lives. During this investigation, 600kg of fertiliser was confiscated from a storage facility.

In the US, an investigation into the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing – one of the most destructive acts of terrorism on American soil – uncovered a stockpile of more than 2300kg of fertiliser.

You can help safeguard Australia from terrorism by:

- ensuring stocks of chemical compounds, particularly fertilisers and insecticides, are secure;

- undertaking regular stock audits and reporting discrepancies to the National Security Hotline (NSH) on 1800 123 400 and your local police, and;

- remaining vigilant and reporting suspicious activity, such as unusual stockpiling of chemicals, to the NSH on 1800 123 400.

Every piece of information gathered is important and could provide the missing link for security or intelligence operations – a 2005 terrorist plot in Australia was pieced together by information provided to the NSH by a chemical retailer.

For further information about chemicals of security concern, and hints about identifying suspicious activity, visit www.australia.gov.au/chemicalsecurity



Victorian

MEATWORKS MESSENGER

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GREENHAM



MORE THAN A BUSINESS RELATIONSHIP

For Rob McKenzie, the name of H.W. Greenham & Sons means business – big business.

Rob is the owner of the 5000-head Bunnaloo feedlot west of Mathoura, a major supplier of cattle to the Greenham plants at Smithton and Tongala.

He has been supplying cattle to the company since the early 1970s and is now in constant touch with senior executives Peter Greenham senior, Peter junior and livestock manager Graeme Pretty.

But as far as Rob is concerned, this is more than merely a business relationship. Much more.

His relationship with the Greenham family goes back to his childhood days.

"My father, Tom, and Peter's dad, Harry, used to go duck and quail shooting around Wakool and into northern Victoria," Rob says.

"Reg Ansett used to go with them as well.

"Dad was a livestock agent and auctioneer and used to send a few cows to Greenham off the rail. That's where the acquaintance started."

Rob, now 60, left school at 14 and took up an apprenticeship in a butcher's business in Cohuna. He entered the meat game in 1966.

"As soon as I got my driver's licence, though, I went livestock buying," he says.

"I've been dealing with Peter senior since the '70s. I act as an agent for the company as far away as Blackall, Longreach and Winton and in various other places in New South Wales and South Australia.

"I send a good few cattle to Greenham. The 100% Angus are fed for 72–85 days on a high-grade grain ration then sent to Tasmania for their Pure Black cuts.

"For Tongala, it's the culled dairy cows and bulls I buy from markets that go to make hamburgers for the Americans."

Rob says that, over the years, his business partners at Greenham have become much valued friends.

"Over the past 20 years, I have become very close to Peter senior – we speak often and talk about business, but it's a great friendship that we've developed," he says.

Wouldn't it be nice if the bad news stopped! All we ever seem to hear about are economic woes in the US, UK and Europe.

I know they can't be ignored because the world is now a very connected place. In our situation we depend on the US as the market for nearly all the meat processed at Tongala. And exchange rates make or break our business. So, these economic indicators from overseas are important.

But the local scene is also important, and it seems the news here is a bit brighter. We've had good rain in the last few weeks following a dry start to winter which was in stark contrast to the summer floods.

A few sunny days have sparked some growth and there's plenty of water in the system for the season ahead. Eildon is at 94% as I write this. World dairy prices are looking better and I expect the Goulburn Valley herd is starting to regain some of the ground lost during the drought. That has to be good for everyone.

THE FAMILY BUSINESS DIFFERENCE

As you know, we are a family business and proud of our family heritage. My son Peter who looks after our Tasmanian operations is the sixth generation to work in the business.

There's a difference between the big corporations and family businesses like ours. We value long-term connections and like to establish relationships built on trust – both with the farmers we buy from and the customers we sell to.

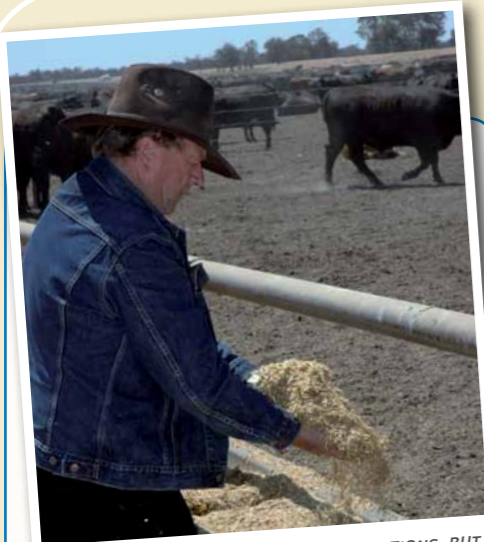
In the story inside you will read Finley farmer Chris White's comments about how he works with our buyer Les Mitchell. That's how we like to do business – it should be a win, win. Everybody has to make a dollar out of the deal.

And in the adjacent story you will read about Rob McKenzie who has been supplying cattle to us for 40 years, and how his father and my father used to go duck shooting together. Can you imagine a large corporate processor being able to tell a story like this? That's what family business is about.

Peter Greenham



ROB MACKENZIE, LEFT, WITH PETER GREENHAM JNR. ROB USES IRRIGATION TO GROW AS MUCH FEED AS POSSIBLE FOR THE FEEDLOT



ALL FEED IS MIXED TO CAREFUL SPECIFICATIONS, BUT ROB STILL LIKES TO CHECK WHAT IS IN THE BUNK.

Continued from front...

"I can call him on a Saturday or Sunday and he's always happy to have a chat.

"I have great relationships, too, with Peter junior and Graeme Pretty – they have been very good to me and I know I can count on them.

"I haven't got the time to go shooting now, and Peter senior isn't interested anyway, but even though we may only meet up two or three times a year, we can ring each other any time of the day.

"I also speak daily with Graeme – maybe several times."

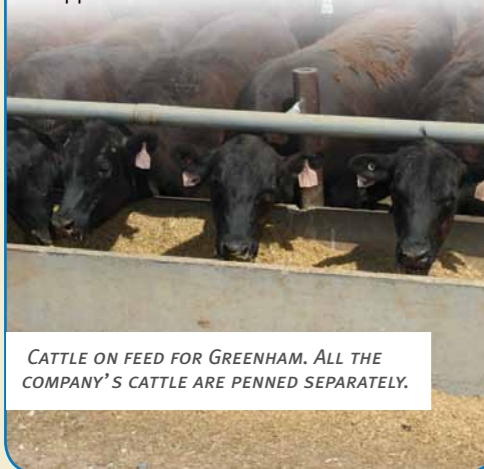
Rob says that, these days, he spends the great majority of his time either at the feedlot or at cattle markets.

"There are certainly highs and lows in this game," he says.

"I've been in it for 40-plus years now and have been through some challenging times.

"At the moment, for example, with the high Australian dollar the Japanese product has dropped out of the feedlot and the grain trade has become very tough.

"It's good to be able to talk those kinds of things over with Peter – he understands what's happening for me and is a great support."



CATTLE ON FEED FOR GREENHAM. ALL THE COMPANY'S CATTLE ARE PENNED SEPARATELY.



TIGHT SHIP RUN AS A BUSINESS

Chris and Heather White are in the business of dairy farming – and that's just the way they see it.

It's all about running a tight ship with the latest technology and a keen eye on the market, though it's quite clear, even after a visit of just a few hours, that they care about their herd.

Chris and Heather run more than 1000 milking cows – plus calves and heifers – over two adjacent properties, Balboora and Warragundra, near Finley.

The properties, totalling 800 hectares all up, could handle more, but, with help from just four casual workers, Chris and Heather feel their numbers are just about right.

"We bought this to retire on," Chris says.

"We've got a duplex in Maroochydore and a fishing batch in Rotorua and our time was meant to be split between those places, not doing this."

TWO THIRDS FRIESIAN

Instead, the couple – both New Zealanders – bought the first of their two farms 12 years ago and have had little time for fishing since – mainly thanks to the drought.

"A lot of dairy farmers farm for lifestyle, but you've got to run it as a business," Chris says.

"The property is set up to handle 1500 cows, but we did a huge amount of culling in the drought. We had 1500, but dropped to 900.

"We're after more numbers now, but we want to have a life as well, so I'd be happy with 1100 to 1200.

"The herd is mostly Friesian, all mixed age, but with a few crossbreds as well – mostly first-cross Friesian-Jersey, but a few licorice allsorts – some Illawarra Red and Swiss Brown. I like to keep everything around two-thirds Friesian.

"We're trying to build numbers back up, so don't cull really hard. We don't cull on age – it's more on their mastitis, their condition score, yield or general health. If they haven't gotten in-calf for a while, and are starting to dry themselves off, we'll flick 'em down the road to Greenham's.

"For our breeding, we use leased bulls and the same bloodline – Mitchell bulls out of three or four AI-bred sires. Next round, we'll use some different bulls – another 20 I've just bred. We normally join heifers at 18 months – running them on a bit bigger suits our program.

"If they're too small, they move around too much on the milking platform.

"We started calving on July 7 and we'll calve 600 in six weeks – maybe up to

30 a day. It's just a numbers game – you might get 1 or 2 per cent that have a problem, but that's normal.

"We do 90 per cent of our calving in the paddock. It's very seldom we have to walk a cow to the dairy or a yard – our cows are so used to us we can calve them where they stand."

SOME TO CHINA

All calves are by AI bulls for the good genetics and all are grown out to 140–150kg.

"Some of our calves are exported to China," he says. "We'll keep everything the buyer doesn't want and that gives us our 200 replacements.

"We're calving 600 cows this year and will have at least 100 calves for China."

Chris milks the fresh colostrum cows first in the afternoons, the milkers second and the sick cows last.

"We milk 60 cows every eight minutes, so it's three hours max," he says.

The Whites sell to Murray Goulburn at Cobram or Rochester.

"We won't peak with our milk quantities until the end of September, but we're climbing about 1000 litres a day at the moment," Chris says.

"We're at 14,000 litres a day now and sending 1000 litres to our 300 calves daily.

"I'd expect we'd get to somewhere between 22,000 and 26,000 litres a day.

The best the farm has ever done is 22,000 litres and I reckon we'll better that this year. I'd be disappointed if we didn't – we've got the feed, the water and the cows.

"We bought 220 more cows in February-March and have brought in 105 of our own as autumn-calvers, so our numbers have gone up. That should mean another 6000 litres above what we did last year, when our totals were 18,000 to 19,000 litres.

"It's a 33,000-litre vat, so we'll go on to daily pick-up now."

BIGGEST IN THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE

Chris and Heather have no computer in the dairy, but have been quick to invest in technology that works for them.

"We don't have computers in the dairy yet, but we do have the biggest backing gate in the southern hemisphere – the first four-wheel-drive ever made," Chris says.

"We also have a solid separator effluent system which has won two environmental awards for us. That separates everything and we make sure we use everything properly."

This grand technology answers some of Chris's problems, but not all.

"The mice have been terrible this year," he says. "They started last spring and have gotten progressively worse – by autumn, they were in plague proportions.

"They've really taken some controlling. Lift up a bale of hay now and there'll be a layer of mice beneath it.

"They're eating all the goodness out of the hay, so the cows aren't doing that flash. We've put Dried Distillers Grain syrup into it, though, and that's made a difference.

"Everything we've planted has Mouse-off on it, plus we've baited round the boundaries and put icing sugar and cement in the dairy. Mix that into a powder and it kills them when they drink water.

"We find mice everywhere. See that bore pump? There were mice 56 metres down stuck in the impeller."

QUALIFIED FOR THE OLYMPICS

Chris came to Australia when he was five and started school at Redcliffe, out of Brisbane, before moving on to Mackay and then New Guinea.

"I started swimming in Mackay and did that for close to 10 years, even becoming Australian junior champion," he says.

"I qualified for the Olympics in 1976 and 1980 for the 200m and 100m breaststroke. As it turned out, both those Games were boycotted, so I didn't get there, but went to New Guinea instead and competed in the South Pacific Games.

"Later on, I set up a trucking business in New Zealand and ran that for 25 years."

NEEDED A REPUTABLE COMPANY

On their Finley properties, Chris and Heather have found a staunch ally in Greenham buyer Les Mitchell.

"We started sending quite a few cows to Greenham during the drought when we did the heavy culling," Chris says. "We needed a reputable company which would take the numbers.

"We try to support local and their pricing is pretty competitive. You can go shopping, but there's a lot more involved.

"There are two times in the year when we cull pretty hard – in August and September, then again in December and January after preg-testing.

"These days, we'll preg-test and any cow that hasn't got in-calf again, is not producing a lot of milk and is starting to put weight on her back, she'll go.

"Les is an ex-dairy farmer, so he understands our needs and wants and why we do it. I'll just ring him and say, 'I've got half-dozen going and when do you want 'em?'"

"They give good service and it's all based on relationship. Les has given me some good advice – he'll go out of his way to try to help you.

"We know our cows are going to be looked after."



THE WHITE'S IMMACULATELY MAINTAINED 60-COW ROTARY HANDLES THE MILKING IN A MAXIMUM OF THREE HOURS.