

International Connections



Charolais Youth committee secretary, Amy Whitechurch from Inverell, New South Wales attended the Charolais Charbray International Youth program in Canada in 2025. Amy reports back on her amazing opportunity.

I've just returned home from the most incredible adventure in Canada—an experience I will never forget, filled with amazing people and unforgettable moments. Visiting Canada has always been a dream of mine, and when I applied for the Charolais Youth International Scholarship, I never imagined I'd be chosen to represent our breed on such a global stage. It was a huge shock when my name was announced at our breed dinner in Sydney! I've been involved with the Charolais breed my entire life, but my real journey began when I started attending youth camps in high school.

I remember when the international initiative first started and thinking how incredible it would be to one day represent our breed overseas. Little did I know that seven years—and a lot of hard work—later, I would have the chance to do exactly that.

My adventure began on the 10th of July with a rough little hop from Armidale to Sydney, which had me worried about the long-haul flight to Los Angeles. Having never left Australia before, I was a pretty “green” flyer and eager to have my feet back on solid ground. Luckily, I sat next to a young woman who had been travelling solo since she was 18 and was also heading to Canada for the Calgary Stampede.

Youth program participants Sander Villman (Estonia), Ragnar Hagg (Sweden), Kristjan Jurisalu (Estonian), Will Meadows (USA). front row: Craig Scott, General Manager Canadian Charolais Association, Amy Whitechurch, Shade Bunke (USA), Makennah Tucker (USA).





We teamed up to navigate the daunting L.A. airport, which—much to my surprise—turned out to be far less hectic than I'd imagined. By 10:30 p.m. we landed safely in Calgary... with the sun still up! That was the first of many surprising Canadian moments. Canadian Charolais General Manager, Craig Scott greeted me with a warm welcome in his silver "truck" and drove me to my first motel for a restless night as I tried to adjust to the time difference.

Arriving two days early, I was lucky enough to tag along with Craig and a few friends to the Preliminary Calgary International Auctioneer Finals at the Strathmore selling barn. What an eye-opening experience! Selling cattle in Canada is very different to Australia. Cattle are brought through an indoor ring (which is also a scale), so buyers know the weight before bidding.

Auctioneers call the price they want, not the current bid and prices are quoted per pound, which is much higher than our kilogram-based market. Listening to Canadians, Americans, and even a South African auctioneer was an experience in itself (even if I couldn't always keep up with their lightning-fast calls!). It was also special to watch our own Australian Matt Pearce in action.

On day two, I met up with Ragnar from Sweden and we headed to the Calgary Stampede—rightly called The Greatest Outdoor Show on Earth. WOW! What an incredible celebration of agriculture and rural life, with a strong Western spirit that you don't often see in Australia. From auctioneer finals to steer shows, roping, bulldogging, barrel racing, bronc riding, and chuckwagon races, we saw it all.

The energy and sheer scale of the Stampede was surreal. Day three marked the official start of the tour, where I met my fellow international travellers for the week: Kristian and Sander from Estonia, Ragnar from Sweden (who I'd met the day before), and Makannah from America, with Shayde from America arriving later that afternoon.

After a rough start due to language barriers, we bonded quickly over breakfast at the famous Tim Hortons—where opinions on Canadian coffee were mixed! I knew right away we were in for a blast of a trip. We then jumped in the van and headed to Banff—a destination that should be on everyone's bucket list. No photo can do it justice. The crystal-clear lakes, towering mountains, and pure alpine air were absolutely breathtaking. We indulged in a little shopping and exploring Banff's charming streets, we sampled Canadian treats with open arms. The maple-flavoured ice cream "Cowndian Maple" from COWS was a unanimous hit before we drove to Lake Minnewanka, arriving just in time before the rain set in. That night we had our first of many dinners at the Boston Pizza franchise, where the maple bacon burger became an instant favourite!

Rain set in on day four, so after a hearty Canadian breakfast and a quick change of plans, we headed for some retail therapy at Canada's largest western store, Irvine's. Over 130,000 square feet of pure Western heaven—trailers, saddles, tack, clothing, boots, hats, knives, you name it (probably everything except the kitchen sink!). Let's just say Christmas shopping may have started—and finished—right there. Afterward, we toured the Davis-Rairdan Embryo Transplant Centre.



Founded in the 1970s, this world-renowned facility specialises in bovine embryo transplants and exports top-quality beef cattle genetics worldwide. Listening to Dr. Adam Schierman share his knowledge and passion for the industry was inspiring.

Day five kicked off the Char-Zamm Conference in Stettler, hosted by the Alberta Charolais Youth group. The first day was all about setting up for the youth show. Because I'm over 21, I was too old to compete, but I worked alongside Cassidy (the youth Co-Ordinator) and gained a behind-the-scenes look at how Canadian youth events are run—coming home with plenty of great ideas for our Australian camp in 2026.

Day six was devoted to individual judging. Much like in Australia, competitors were split into groups and asked to judge three classes—bred heifers, steers, and heifer calves—before presenting their reasons to the judges. I helped tally scores, which gave me the chance to listen in on the competitors' reasoning. It was a long but rewarding day.

Day seven was one of my favourites: herd tours! The Alberta Association organised visits to three very different Charolais operations. Our first stop was Rawe Ranches – Canada's largest Charolais stud, running 800 registered breeders and selling 200 two-year-old bulls annually (a point of difference, as most Canadian breeders typically market yearling bulls in February). A proud fourth-generation operation, Rawe Ranches are heavily focused on performance testing and breeding bulls for commercial producers. Next, we visited Prairie Cove Charolais, operated by the Bullick family. Though a smaller program, it is built on a strong foundation of elite donor females, which are heavily utilised throughout the herd via AI and embryo transfer. Each year, they market a select group of exceptional females and young sires, showcasing the strength of their breeding program. Our third and final stop for the day was EXL/RJ Select Charolais, owned by the Rairdan family. Another third-generation farming enterprise, the Rairdans have recently returned to Charolais breeding while continuing to run a large-scale cropping operation. The next generation—the Rairdan grandchildren—are now driving the program, utilising AI and embryo transfer to rebuild the herd with a strong focus on producing genetics tailored for the commercial industry. It was inspiring to see how each operation, while unique, shared the same passion for quality breeding.

Day eight featured educational sessions and showmanship classes. The young Canadian handlers were exceptionally talented, and our international group even got to compete in a showmanship round—followed by an unexpected dance-off led by judge Will Meadows, an American ag influencer and fellow Charolais breeder. The final day of Char-Zamm was the confirmation classes (or what we call breed classes). Sitting in the grandstand and watching future industry leaders exhibit such high-quality cattle was the perfect way to wrap up the event.





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Amy Whitechurch ”

Afterward, we packed up and gathered for a farewell dinner with great food, lively conversation, awards, and a spirited auction to close the night.

Before heading back to Calgary, we squeezed in a visit to the Discovery Wildlife Park where we saw deers, porcupines, wolves, dinosaurs, lions and bears, we even posed with a real brown bear! From here we headed to McLeod Livestock, where Rod and April McLeod and their daughter Megan gave us a tour of their family operation near Cochrane, Alberta. Running 150 breeders and selling 50 bulls annually, the McLeod's purchased the standout sire SCX Jehu in 2021 for \$245,000, so it was exciting to see his progeny and the impact he's had on their herd. We capped off the day with a casual axe-throwing session—though I quickly learned it's not my hidden talent, while Kristian and Sander, the Estonian boys proved to be naturals! After our final farewells, it was sad to leave what had become lifelong friends as the journey back to Australia began.

This trip has truly opened my eyes to the strength and unity within our industry. Despite being over 14,000 km apart, it's amazing how connected we all are through our shared passion for the Charolais breed and our commitment to future generations.

The group of young breeders I met were inspiring driven by the same love for cattle and the agricultural way of life. I've made friendships and formed connections that I know will last a lifetime.

To all the wonderful Canadians who welcomed us into your farms and hearts, thank you for your warmth and hospitality. A heartfelt thank you also goes to the Charolais Society of Australia for this incredible opportunity, and to the Canadian Charolais Association for hosting such a meaningful event. And a very special thank you to Craig and Cathy Scott, your kindness, generosity, and the beautiful parts of Canada you shared with me will always hold a special place in my heart.

As I reflect on this life-changing trip, one lesson stands out: When opportunity knocks, don't let fear hold you back. Open the door and embrace what lies ahead.



2026 INTERNATIONAL YOUTH PROGRAM
 will be hosted by the
American International Charolais Association
 Emails will be sent early 2026 for applications