

RECRUITING IN AUSTRALIA



What started out as a desperate bid to find help for the ranch has bloomed into a second business

Alberta's labour crunch created headaches for some farms and opportunities for others. Craig Ference looked to Australia to find seasonal employees for his farm near Kirriemuir, Alta. He and his father operate Double F Farms and Cascade Cattle Corp., which also takes in property near Biggar, Sask.

His own experience living and working in Australia for a year between high school and university proved to be a rewarding adventure that helped to shape his future course in life. Now he's helping to create the same opportunities for Australian youth who want to work on farms in Canada.

"We started hiring Australians four years ago for our cow-calf operation and have never had a regret or issue," Ference says. The farm employs two full-time and three seasonal workers. Lately, the seasonal workers have for the most part been from Australia. One employee has stayed on full time and hopes to make Canada his permanent residence.

"We have been so pleased with the work ethics and abilities of these employees, and they bring completely new and diverse ideas with them," he adds. The arrangement has been every bit as much a learning opportunity for Ference as it has for the employees. The alternative viewpoints allow him to break out of the rut of everyday routine by stepping back to take a look at other ways he could be doing things. Some ideas have worked very well and others not, he says, but it's done no harm to try them. "To me, Australians have a good-hearted, easygoing nature about them. They are well-rounded farm kids with rural roots," Ference says. "We seem to be losing these qualities in our young Canadians. Every year there are fewer and fewer quality farm kids available to employ. Our goal is to try and fill this void."



Craig Ference

Cascade recruitment

His new business, Cascade Recruitment, was set up this year to assist other farm operations — ranches, feedlots, dairy and grain — find the right Australian employee for the job.

"We look after all of the logistics and paperwork, so all the employer needs to do is decide if the person would be suited for their operation," Ference explains. Employers do need to make arrangements for lodging, whether on the place or in town, so that the new arrival has a place to stay while he or she gets settled in.

Ference does suggest appropriate wages based on the employee's experience and training for the job, but it's up to the employer to decide on the pay scale. The goal is to find a happy



Nichole Limberg from Australia on ATV with calf and dog



Chris Flemming from Australia and Craig Ference at the tipping table

medium that will prove to be positive for the employee and affordable for the farm.

Cascade Recruitment recently joined forces with Stu Austin of Positive-Perfection in Australia. Austin selects and screens the employees and Ference finds well-suited farms in Western Canada for them. The fee structure is based on the quality, experience and ability of the employee and duration of the contract.

When he spent the year in Australia, a working holiday visa was limited to one year and it was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Today, working holiday visas for both countries allow youth, ages 18 through 30 years, to stay for two years and the visas are renewable.

As Australians settle in for their winter, Canadian farms spring to life. By April, Ference had Australian

employees willing to work in any type of Canadian agricultural operation for terms from three months to one year.

Positive-perfection

Down under, Austin assists applicants in making preparations for their working holidays in Canada. This involves looking after details such as applying for the visa, acquiring a social insurance number and setting up a bank account in Canada before they leave Australia.

Austin's working holiday visa landed him in Alberta in the spring of 2007. Since then, he has worked as a tour guide on trail rides into the Rockies, on drilling rigs and until recently, as a farmhand on a seed farm near Wainright. Between times he travelled to B.C. and south into the States.

He's sold on Canada and the opportunities in agriculture here. In fact, he has a small photo album of scenic and farm landscapes in Canada on his website, www.positive-perfection.com.

During his two-year stay, he became involved with Alberta's young agricul-



Cascade Cattle Corp pairs on pasture

ture industry group and is the current vice-chair of FABB (Future Agriculture Business Builders). He took in the Rock the Farm conference in Red Deer, then braved Saskatchewan weather in March to attend the Saskatchewan Young Agricultural Entrepreneurs conference in Saskatoon. The Agriculture and Food Council's 2009 Human Resources Congress in Calgary was another conference of interest.

Austin's familiarity with people, places, lifestyles and working con-

ditions in Canada, along with Ference's knowledge of Australia and his contacts there, is a great combination when it comes to arranging the best employee-employer matches. In the near future, they hope to offer their services to young Canadian farmers looking for working holidays in Australia.

For more information, contact Ference at 780-753-1283, or craigference@hotmail.com.

— Debbie Furber 

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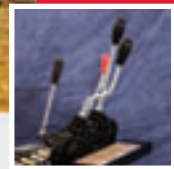
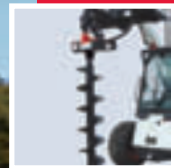
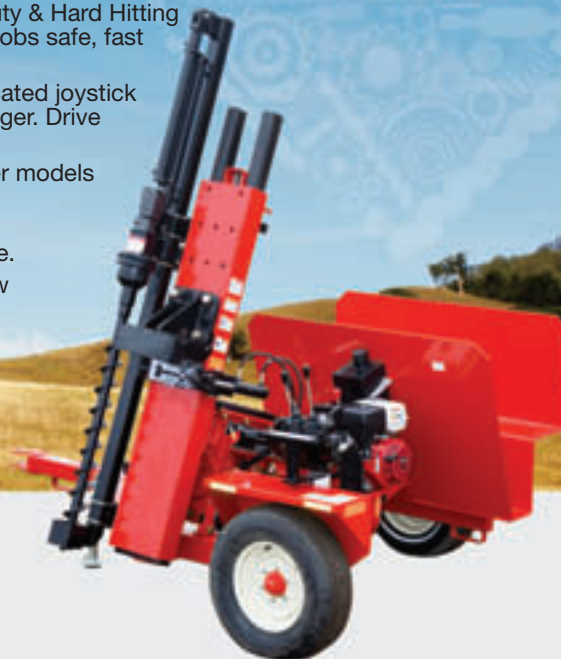
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