

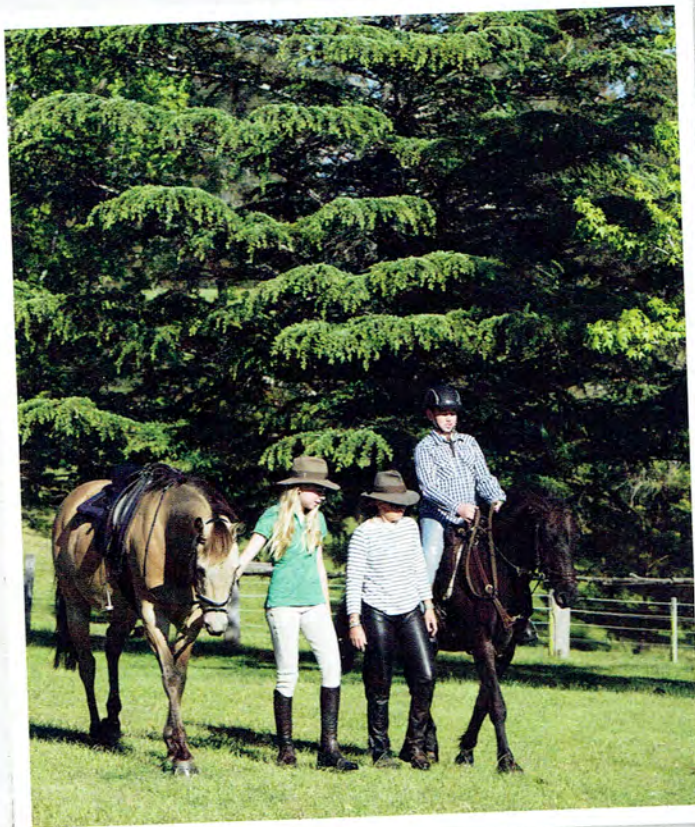
From left: Rob, William and his kelpie Zeus, Emma with kelpie-coolie cross Gryphon and poodle Monte, and Bella with her horse, Phoenix.



our life in the country

EMMA LIPSCOMBE AND ROB BRADLEY KEPT THEIR CITY JOBS WHEN THEY MADE A BREAK FOR THE COUNTRY – BUT RAISING BELTED GALLOWAY CATTLE IS NOW A CONSUMING PASSION.

WORDS KYLIE WALKER PHOTOGRAPHY BRIGID ARNOTT



Sometimes life takes us further, and faster, than planned. When Emma Lipscombe and her husband, Rob Bradley, bought Mogendoura Farm on the NSW south coast in 2011, they saw it as somewhere they would move once their children were grown. In the meantime, they planned to revive a farmstay business that had been operating on the property, which lies about eight kilometres from the coastal town of Moruya.

They installed caretakers on the 89-hectare farm, but gradually the couple — and Bella, now 16, and 13-year-old William — found themselves travelling south from Sydney more and more often. Part of the attraction was a handful of Belted Galloways, a breed of cattle that had fascinated Emma since she was a child.

Emma and Rob freely admit they knew nothing about cattle when they started out. Both grew up in the city — Rob in Canberra, Emma in Canberra and Sydney — and had built careers there. But gradually they began to consider a life in the country. “We couldn’t have moved them out of school further along,” Rob says.

And so, in January 2012, the family moved south. Now Rob and Emma combine their off-farm jobs with managing a herd of 70 Belted Galloways, selling the meat at the local farmers’ market. Rob is the CEO of the Confederation of Australian Sport, a job that involves quite a lot of travel, while Emma works part-time for the Foundation for National Parks and Wildlife.

“The people down here have been so supportive,” Emma says. “We were a bit concerned we’d be viewed as city slickers coming in and thinking we knew everything, whereas we came in and went ‘We know nothing, so any assistance would be greatly appreciated.’ We got a lot of help, everyone has been fantastic.

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For more information about stays at Mogendoura Farm, telephone 0412 468 921 or visit mogendoura.com.au

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rob The children used to ask why we couldn’t live on the farm full-time, and the answer was work, and having an income. Emma and I are fortunate to have generous employers who allow us the flexibility to work around the farm jobs. Both of us love our other jobs, too, which makes it all much easier.

I never imagined I’d be a farmer, or even live on a farm. But it’s been a great decision for us.

The most challenging thing was getting the property in shape for us to build and manage our Beltie herd properly. The previous owners had been more into horses and horseriding, so the paddocks needed serious restoration in terms of fencing and pasture quality.

The sheer scale and amount of materials and resources required to make a difference is massive. Fortunately, we started out in a very small way with just five cows and then built from there. We have 70 head now, including more than 30 calves; there are 20 secure paddocks of various sizes and we’re improving the pasture quality. There’s a fair way to go but we’re happy with the progress and try to be realistic about how long it will take to be completely sustainable and efficient.

Emma has skills in marketing and PR, along with enormous enthusiasm and passion. She’s the champion of pasture management and weed control. I’ve got a different skill set — I can do the more mundane construction and maintenance tasks, and I handle the bookkeeping and accounting, the financial side.

We love living on the farm and the work that’s involved. There are lots of little jobs to be done; at times it seems to be never ending, but we all enjoy it. It’s great to be outdoors.

And I like being able to go and fish in the river. We wander down there after work and throw a line in. Our strike rate is pretty good — I reckon about six or seven times out of 10 we’d catch something. Usually flathead or bream but once we landed a nice sized trevally. Bella has the prize for the biggest catch so far — a 70-centimetre flathead. Mostly we throw them back, so they’re there for next time.

I don’t think anyone has any regrets. Everything about our move has worked really well. >



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT Bella in the orchard; a Belted Galloway called China Bear; the view of the Moruya River from the home paddock; Zeus loves getting involved in the farm activities; an airy dining area that overlooks Mogendoura Creek; the family run 70 head of cattle; Emma with Rex, an orphaned lamb the family raised, and poodle Monte; saddles at the ready. FACING PAGE "The kids are going from strength to strength," says Emma.



OUR LIFE IN THE COUNTRY

FROM LEFT The remains of an old wagon outside a building on the farm; Bella with Phoenix. FACING PAGE 'Belties', a breed that originated in Scotland, in one of the paddocks.



emma I grew up in Canberra and then went to boarding school in Sydney — and one day, on the trip between the two cities, I spotted a Belted Galloway. After that, I always made sure I was awake during the stretch around Goulburn so I could see the Belties on a hillside there.

When we bought the farm, it was a chance for me to have a couple of Belties. As we investigated the breed further, we discovered that their meat is sought after. And they're dual producers — they can be milkers, too. That's something we'd like to look at down the track.

We're trying to do sustainable farming — looking to find a balance between having a productive farm and protecting some high-value conservation areas. The property is quite unusual in that we've only got one common land boundary. The main borders are the Mogendoura Creek and the Moruya River, so there's quite a bit of foreshore with river flats and wetlands that we want to protect. We've fenced off some of that, but at the same time we're doing quite a bit of pasture improvement to ensure we can carry the amount of cattle we need to make it productive.

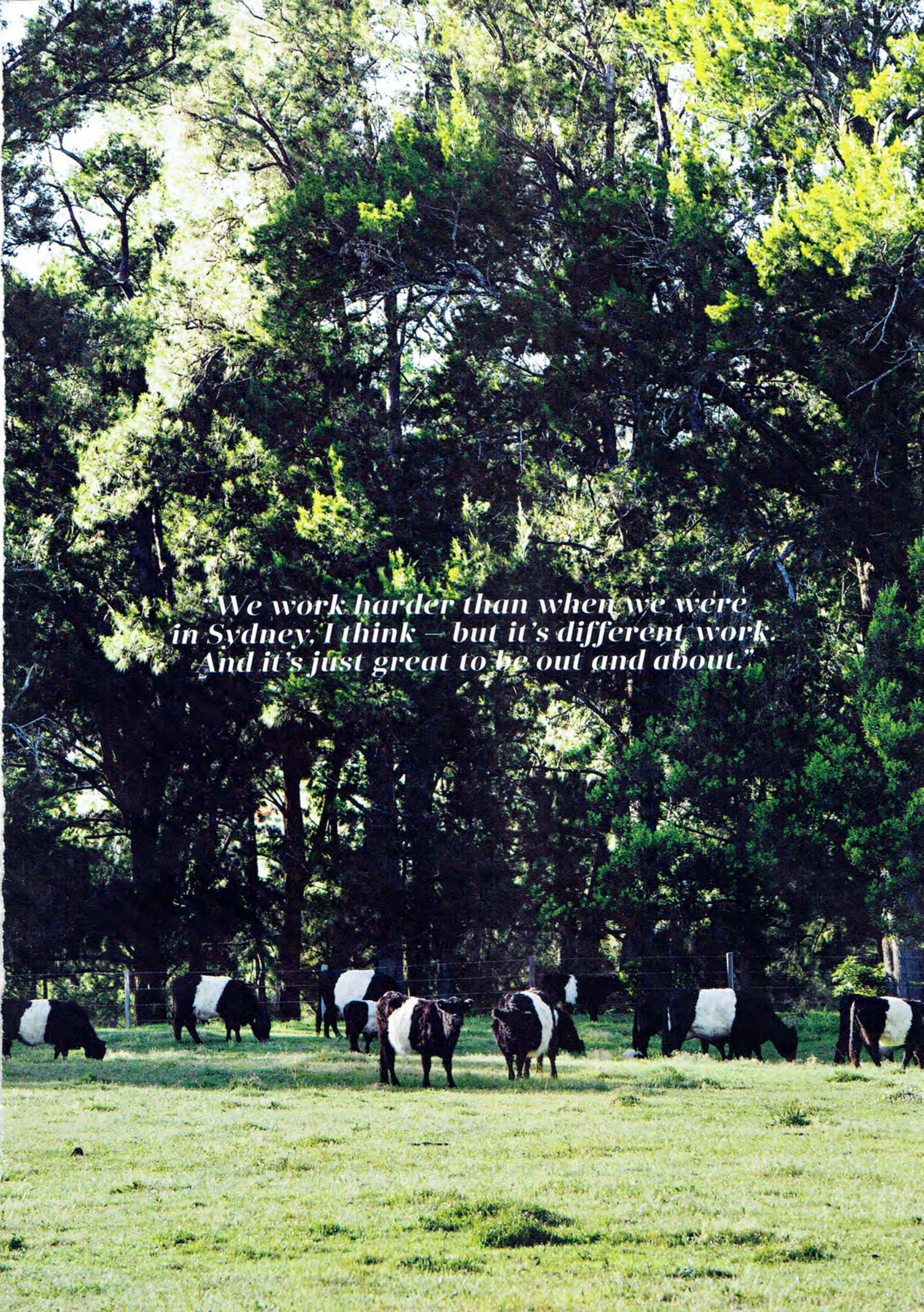
We sell the meat at the Moruya farmers' market. I love the interaction with the other producers and customers — I really enjoy talking about what we've raised and how we get it there. William helps me in summer, he loves it too.

We've also started selling the cowhides — at the market and at a shop in Moruya. Again, it's about trying to be a little bit more sustainable; we want to use the whole animal. I've experimented with biltong, which we do for ourselves and for friends, and we make dehydrated liver treats for dogs, which we sell at the market.

The kids are totally blossoming down here. We've joined the pony club and Bella bought a horse — we put in something but she paid for most of it with money that she'd saved. William has a horse too, and they both have dogs. Our city dog, Monte, is a very old, standard poodle, who has managed to adapt to country life in his retirement. It's been good for him — he's had to stay fit to keep up with the younger dogs.

We came down here with our eyes wide open knowing that it could be, to coin a kid's phrase, an 'epic fail'. Things were tough in that first year and they still are tough. We work harder than when we were in Sydney, I think — but it's different work. And it's just great to be out and about.

We're happy and the cows are happy. We're not out to make a million dollars, we just want to make enough money to keep the farm going and to stay doing the things we want to do. *



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