

# When my barley smiles at me I go to Rio

By Lloyd O'Connell

There was a lot of singing on our recent *Australian Cottongrower and Grain* study tour to South America (see accompanying panel for a few selected snippets). This was a good thing because not only did it give a very happy tenor to the occasion, it also meant we weren't actually eating at that particular moment.

And in our tireless efforts in seeking new end-uses for Australian farm products, there wasn't a lot on your average Chilean, Argentine, Brazilian or Peruvian menu that escaped the curiosity of our groups' collective taste-buds.

You could say we were the guinea pigs for many inventive dishes — in fact some of the more intrepid members of our group ate a couple of the cute little rodents in Peru. (That was one particular animal end-use we had no trouble striking off the list.)

Necessary, and invariably enjoyable as it was, eating wasn't the main purpose of the study tour. We were determined to find out first-hand what our southern hemisphere competitors are up to in terms of agriculture — and in keeping with the food and size of meals theme — 'a fair bit' would be an accurate assessment.

## IT'S MUCHOS BIG

The lasting impression you can't possibly avoid about South America is the sheer size of the continent and the potential productivity of its huge land mass. To give you an idea



From snowy Andes crossings . . .

of size, Australia fits comfortably into Brazil and that country takes up less than half the land mass of South America. There is very little country we travelled through that didn't have deep, fertile soils and an annual rainfall of at least 1000 very reliable mm.

And travel we did. If you are going to venture into the regional areas you have to be prepared for some long days — and long nights. But it is all very much worth

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To improvised battering rams on Copacabana Beach . . .

## TUNES TO TOUR BY

### PEOPLE WE'VE MET

*We've met some wild Victorians  
and learnt of Moree toast  
Pink jobs and blue jobs  
and shopping trends for most  
There's forty films from Janet  
and Murray's moving still  
And stories of lost pyjamas  
and a burst from our Poet Lauriet at will*  
(Don Thomson, Tincurrin, WA)

### FARMERS COME IN MANY TYPES

*Farmers come in many types  
no two are the same  
But one thing we now all know  
on this trip we're pleased we came  
Passing through the Andes  
The ground was white with snow  
A fairytale scene for us Aussies  
But too cold for crops to grow*  
(Julienne Brimblecombe, Capella, Qld)

### HOTEL SOUTH AMERICA

*Londrina, Rondo, Rio  
Aqua sin gas on ice  
We are all just prisoners here on this bus  
Of Lloyd and Regina's device.  
And in the churrascarrias  
We gathered for the feast  
We stab it with our steely knives  
But we just can't cut the beef*  
(Dibs Cush, Moree, NSW)

### SOUTH AMERICAN ODYSSEY

*They came from Australia  
Farming is their game  
Grain – cotton – sorghum  
Their adversities the same  
So if you crave a challenge  
and a visit to foreign terrain  
Venture out with Greenmount Travel  
and subscribe to The Australian  
Cottongrower and Grain*  
(Bobbie Thomson, Tincurrin, WA)

### I STILL CALL AUSTRALIA HOME

*To far South America we all did travel  
Mystery of the Incas we tried to unravel  
Dining in a cave on cold mountainside  
Under falls at Iguasu we did ride*  
(Pam Hedt, Dimboola Vic, Dibs & Julienne)



The farming scenes in Peru went from the sublime . . .



To the ridiculous(ly) spectacular Machu Pichu. David Brimblecombe sizing up terrace farming in Peru.

◀ 40...SOUTH AMERICA

the effort to experience the people, sights and cultures of South America.

We were continually amazed by the diversity of production individual farms were capable of in such favourable climatic and physical conditions. And we were also continually told by our farming compatriots that we shared a common scourge in the pursuit of profitable farming — US and EC subsidies.

There are individual stories to be told in coming issues of this magazine on cotton production and general agriculture in South America. But a few key points about farming in Brazil gives you some insight into farming in Latin America.

- Brazil is a nation of 170 million people (sixth largest population in the world) and 30 per cent of its economy revolves around agriculture;
- Because of this large population and expanding textile industry, Brazil is an importer of many primary products including wheat (seven million tonnes a year) and cotton (380,000 bales in 2001);
- Brazil covers an area of 8.5 million square km and half of the land mass enjoys a sub-tropical climate;
- Brazil produced around three million bales in 2001–02 but this figure fluctuates according largely to the returns for soybean — cotton's main alternative crop;
- Average yields from dryland cotton production are the highest in the world at around three bales per acre; and,
- There is more untouched area suitable for farming in Brazil than the US currently farms. And this does not include the Amazon region which is now under very strict land clearing controls.