

2009 FARM STUDY TOURS

SECTION 1 OVERVIEW

This section brought to you in association with



Overseas travel is important to allow growers to keep up to date with the latest production practices and ideas from around the world. It allows Australian farmers to stay at the leading edge of agricultural efficiency. In 2009, Greenmount Travel took three highly successful – and enjoyable – study tours to three very different parts of the world.

Things are big in Brazil

By Brian O'Connell

There's a lot to like about Brazil, particularly if you are an Australian cotton farmer. For a start there are a lot of really good things in Brazil that all seem to come in large sizes – and I am not just referring to the Samba dancers. Mind you ... but I digress!

Our Greenmount agricultural study tourists recently took a quick look at just a small part of Parana and Mato Grosso states in Southern Brazil on their 24 day trek around South America. The amount of really good arable land is breathtaking. Brazil has a total land area of nearly 8.5 million square kilometres and there's something growing on all of that area all of the time. Australia has over 7.5 million square kilometres and in some years some things grow on some parts of that area.

The size of the rivers in Brazil is obscene – sorry, must be seen to be believed. The FAO has Brazil down as the number one ranked country in the world when it comes to natural total renewable water resources – over 8000 cubic kilometres per year. In a good cyclone season Australia can nearly manage 400.

We flew a relatively short hop from Maringa in Parana State to Rondonopolis in Mato Grosso. Because we were not long in the air we stayed low and had a great view of a small part of Brazil's water resources. Our flight took us along part of the Parana River – which is only just a river in Brazil – more of a creek really. We saw it at the end of the dry and, believe me; one day's flow from this dry little river would solve all the problems in the Murray Darling system for the next decade.

The local farmers are not particularly moved by the water in the rivers – in fact they aren't bothered about the potential for irrigation at all. I suppose with a reliable rainfall of around 1500 mm per year falling largely between September and February they are fairly happy with their lot.

And then we went to see a cotton farm – it was big. The Maggi Scheffer family moved their farming operation from the Parana to Mato Grosso in 1982. They leased country near Rondonopolis and went on to build up the Bom Futuro Farming Group. The company in 2008–09 grew 180,000 hectares of soybeans and 55,000 hectares of corn on 70 farms across the Mato Grosso. This season, because of low prices, they are only growing 35,000 hectares of cotton – back from 52,000 hectares last year.

They average eight bales per hectare (rain grown) with good colour, strength and length. They grow conventional Fiber Max varieties using around eight sprays for the season but are looking to GM Liberty Link next season.

The company owns eight gins – the gin trash is burned in boilers for energy, fed to stock and composted. They truck the ginned bales to port and, in good price years, they send security with the trucks.

And now for some more big numbers – they have 1000 state of the art cotton planters, 200 high clearance self propelled sprayers and 150 cotton pickers. There are 3000 employees to operate the gear. Sixty per cent of their country is double cropped with soybeans and cotton so they have 200 headers to harvest the two to three tonnes per hectare of soybeans.

But wait there's more – they have decided there might be some value in all that water that is just flowing past. A fish farming pilot project with 110 hectares of ponds fed by gravity from the local 'creek', yielded nearly 2000 tonnes of 'Paku' (catfish) and grossed about US\$3 million last year. Bom Futuro is also building a hydro electricity facility – and why not?

TOP: Just a few of the 1000 planters owned by the Bom Futuro Group.

BOTTOM: They also farm a few catfish – worth about US\$3 million a year.

