Teens live on the land

BY DAVIS HARRIGAN

TEN city teenagers from Muirfield High School in Sydney's west were given the chance to spend a week on farms near Finley last week.

The Farm Experience Program was developed by Rabobank as an opportunity for the teenagers to experience life away from the city, and to learn first-hand about farming processes and food production.

Year 10 student Caitlin Pollitt said her expectations were exceeded after her time at the "Cornalla East" cropping property.

"We couldn’t believe how hands on we could get," she said of the experience.

"It definitely opened my eyes to how much advance planning farmers need to do," Pollitt said.

Pollitt and fellow classmate Kate Milne had 3000 hectares to control along with owners Bill and Simone Dudley.

Mr Dudley said the girls did not back down from tasks they had to undertake.

“They really got a taste of what we do, even attending the local school production that our two boys were involved in,” he said.

Mr Dudley said his family got involved in the program to “challenge some of the perceptions held in the city.”

“We wanted to show the sophistication of modern farming practices and manage a farming business,” he said.

Mustering cattle, marking lambs and monitoring wheat crop, the two students completely changed their stereotypes of farmers.

“A lot of people get the impression that farmers just ride a tractor, but it is so much more than that,” Milne said.

“Farmers are constantly faced with decisions that have an impact on their whole livelihood.”

Students were also treated to off-farm tours including the Sunrice milling and packing facility in Deniliquin, and a visit to a machinery dealership in Finley.

Rabobank’s head of sustainable business development Marc Oostdijk said the program gave students the opportunity to discover where produce comes from, but also for careers in agriculture.

“We hope that by experiencing rural life, students will take back to their families … an understanding of farming life,” he said.

Pollitt said the experience had helped her become more confident and independent.

"I had to do things for myself, and when you work as a team you have others depending on you," she said.
HANDS ON: Caitlin Pollitt feeding a dairy calf at Gerrit Visscher’s dairy farm, Finley, as part of the week-long Farm Experience Program from Rabobank.