

# Farmers, fun and frolics

## as city meets the bush

**By LEESHA MCKENNY**

THE crowds came for the showbags, stayed for the rides, but hopefully left with a better understanding of regional Australia after a bumper weekend at the Sydney Royal Easter Show.

That was the message from Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Tony Burke from the woodchopping ring yesterday, who said the show was one of the few opportunities for the city and bush to come together.

"You cannot underestimate what comes out of that sort of interaction," he said.

Mr Burke said a new Primary Industries Education Foundation would encourage young people to look at career opportunities in the farming sector, one of the most resilient industries during the economic downturn.

And, young women, this means you. Between 1996 and 2001, 70 per cent fewer young women entered farming, compared with the same period in the mid-1970s.

"Some of the best farmers in the nation are young women," Mr Burke said.

Alison McIntosh from the Royal Agriculture Society's youth group said the drought, plus the perception that there

were fewer options in the bush, were taking their toll on rural communities.

"Just because it looks good [here at the show] doesn't mean it always is," she said.

April drought figures released yesterday showed the proportion of the state in drought has increased more than 3 per cent to 59.6 per cent, with areas of the Central West, Tablelands and New England now drought-declared.

The Koleb family from Richmond in Victoria were among the thousands doing

their bit yesterday, driving up to spend their 13th show with family from Sydney.

"It's a bit of a hassle but still we love it and the kids love it," Minja Koleb said.

Norm Goodall from Epping braved tens of thousands of people at Homebush to spend the day with his wife, daughter and two granddaughters.

"My wife and I have been married for 43 years and we've only missed the show once," he said.

"That's why I'm sitting down."