THE HORMONAL MAIL

THE OFFICIAL QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF CLASSIC LIVESTOCK MANAGEMENT SERVICES.

VOLUME 1. NUMBER 46.

OCTOBER 2017

MANAGEMENT SERVICES
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EDITORIAL

Welcome to our October quarterly newsletter. Despite the challenges facing the beef industry, particularly in the rangeland areas in Australia where the big dry is tightening its grip on production, it is great to see the optimism that is continuing in industry. The level of interest at Agricultural shows in the stud cattle industry and, in particular, in the Hoof and Hook competitions continues to be encouraging. It is also encouraging for our business to know that a number of people who, whilst they may not necessarily be using our system directly, are using some of the same selection criteria to add to their success at these shows. Our congratulations to those producers for their success and may it continue into the future.

I am always keen to get feedback from you about the topics that I cover in our newsletters or for contributions or ways I can make the newsletter more readable. I would like to thank a number of you who have responded to requests for this and I hope I am discussing suggested topics etc. Our aim is to share as much information that may be useful to as many producers as possible and not just our information, but also the vast knowledge that you have also gathered over the years. So please feel free to send me articles and information that would be useful to others. I see all this information as tools in our toolboxes that we know are there for us if and when we need or choose to use them.

I know I have written about the state of the cattle gene pool previously and I would like to add more comments again in this edition. It nearly seems that at present we are inventing so called “new breeds” of cattle just for the sake of experimenting without any real goal in mind, or if there is a goal, it is not being successfully reached. Coincidently, just a few days after I had written on this topic for this newsletter, I received an emailed contribution from one of our readers and someone we have worked with a little with their cattle so I thought it would be opportune to add this at the end of the newsletter. I am happy to print your comments on this topic or any others you may choose in regard to the cattle industry, even if they aren’t necessarily our own views. We encourage an open discussion on all topics for the betterment of the industry.

WHAT'S (BEEN) HAPPENING

* We completed what was, from our point of view, a very successful 5 day course at the Clermont showgrounds and sale yards from Mon. July 31st. through to Fri. 4th. of August. I would like to thank all those who attended and our hope is that it was time well spent and has added some more tools to your cattle evaluation toolbox. Thank you also for persevering and rescheduling your busy calendars after we had to postpone the originally planned course because of the weather conditions at the time. We had 16 people attend the course altogether, though 2 – 3 were not able to spend the full 5 days with us because of prior commitments. However, I hope that there was something there for everyone.
* I would like to thank Albert Hancock for again making the time to share the training workload with me as well as Doug Paton, one of our company directors from Corryong in Northern Victoria who, along with his son James, travelled to Clermont for the course. Doug also assisted with the training and shared his vast knowledge of the system with those who attended.
* Many thanks also to Rosemary Robertson, who assisted greatly in organising the course and getting the logistics in place to ensure things ran as smoothly as possible. The assistance from Dorothy Hancock, Albert's wife, who worked with my wife to do the catering etc. was also most appreciated along with the help of Michael Bell, who came up from Canberra again to assist us as a facilitator on the course.
* We have not yet made any plans to hold a 2 day conference that I mentioned in the last newsletter. We will give some more thought to whether we go ahead with this at our upcoming annual meeting in October. If anyone has any suggestions in terms of a time and place that would suit you best, it would certainly help us when we make some decisions on this topic.
* I will be heading to Tallangatta in Northern Victoria later this week for our annual meeting and calling on producers on the way home through NSW. I also to go to Central Qld. Later this month or early November.
* We are still very keen to hold more field days in localised areas over the next few months, so if you would like one in your area, please let myself, Albert Hancock (0267334666) or other company directors know and we will get it under way. We would like to be as flexible as possible in our future planning and would welcome and appreciate any input that you can provide for us in this regard. I have had several enquiries about when we will hold another 5 day course and whilst we plan to hold more of these in the future, there are some challenges, especially in getting a minimum of 10 people to attend in one area. Unfortunately, the enquiries I have received have come from at least 3 states and we don't really want people to have to travel too far to attend. We have had a couple of generous offers from people to use their facilities for both 1 day and 5 day courses and we are grateful to those people and hopefully can accept their offers in the not too distant future. The main requirements for us when we are holding these days are yard/crush facilities plus a building suitable for catering and running a power point presentation.
*We now have linear measuring callipers available for sale for $100.00 plus freight so if you are interested, please let me know. If possible, I will deliver them during my travels.
*We remain keen to get some marketing of graded cattle going and are happy to advertise for any of our clients here in the newsletter or on our website. We are also adding a link to our website that will put prospective buyers and sellers in contact with each other.

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BREEDING OR BOTCHING?

Over the last century there has been an increasing number of new breeds created, usually with the aim of producing the "super breed" that is going to make their creators rich and famous. It hasn't happened yet and I doubt if it will. Nature created the original breeds to be productive for a number of reasons as far as cattle are concerned. The two we are interested in are to produce good quality meat or milk for human consumption. You could also add a third reason in the form of producing cattle as draught animals. Breeds developed to fill one of these three needs over centuries in specific environmental and geographic areas and over that time those particular breeds have developed to produce whatever it is that is best suited to nature in their area to the best of their ability. Over that time, man selected and bred to improve those

breeds within their environment and geographic location without any input from bloodlines from other areas. They developed those specific breeds to produce consistent, well-balanced and repeatable offspring to the extent that they knew before a calf was born what its characteristics were going to be. That is not the case today. Sure, we get some exceptionally good species, but we also get some of the opposite. The reason is quite simple and straight forward. We are breeding from animals with large gene pools with animals with different large gene pools and so predictability and repeatability becomes a game of chance. This selection process becomes even more grotesque when we start trying to improve just one or two traits such as weight gain or feed conversion etc. from this large gene pool. Yes, we will get a few animals that may perform at the top of the range, but at what cost? We don't hear about the ones that don't make the grade out of those herds. Nor do we hear about the important traits that are lost when selection is based on limited traits just to satisfy one or two specific markets. I discussed the importance of femininity in our last newsletter. Femininity is a trade-off for high weight gains in far too many cases. High weight gain animals are usually quite masculine and so the trend to breed this type of animals in the male offspring often leads to females in those herds that lack femininity and fertility.

The importance of keeping a tight gene pool cannot be over-emphasised. The poultry industry and the thoroughbred horse industries are two industries that have, generally speaking, kept tight gene pools. Anyone who is interested in this can trace the breed history of some of Australia's (or any country for that matter) most prolific major horse race winners and you will see that they have centuries of family breeding behind them. Certainly the winning of feature races provides one of a number of measuring sticks for the thoroughbred industry.

Unfortunately, the cattle industry has not yet been able to come together to develop a simple, efficient method of measuring the most desirable traits in their animals. It's not so much about the biggest or best as the most efficient and profitable. A smaller cow that has 15 – 20 calves in her lifetime, all of whom are viable and functional is of more value than the cow that spasmodically produces the occasional top calf, then misses for a season then produces an average calf for a couple of years before breaking down.

My concerns for the state of the purity of our individual breed herds has increased steadily over recent years with rumours of different stud breeders using bloodlines from another breed to infuse a trait to improve something about their breed they consider is lacking without considering why that is the case or looking elsewhere for that trait within their own breed. These concerns were only increased when I heard recently of stud stock from a well know breed being DNA tested for breed purity and only returning an 87% test return. So far, other breeds have been smart enough to avoid such scrutiny, but for how long and especially given that we have the testing facilities available now that haven't been there until recent years. If I was a stud breeder, I would be looking very closely at the source of my replacement stock.

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BREED OF THE QUARTER

BRAUNVIEH

The Braunvieh are a breed of cattle that originated in Switzerland, though their name means "brown cattle" in German. The breed has developed since the 1600's from a basis of at least 12 different types of brown cattle found in Switzerland. The original Braunvieh had a wide variation of type and size that have now evolved into the modern day breed. The Braunvieh was originally a triple-purpose breed, used for milk production, for meat and for draught work. The first known herd book for the breed was that kept at a monastery from 1775 to 1782. During the 19th. century, breeders started to export them to surrounding countries and a breed society was formed for the breed in Switzerland in 1897.

By 1974, they accounted for 47% of the cattle found in Switzerland and were second in herd size to the Simmental breed. The Braunvieh have now been exported throughout the world including all of Europe, Russia, the Americas and Australia.

Substantial cross-breeding occurred between 1967 and 1998 with the American Brown Swiss with the aim of improving milk yield, physical size, and udder conformation. In Switzerland some breeders continued to breed the traditional type of

dual-purpose Braunvieh, and this was formalised as the Schweizer Original Braunvieh in 1993.
It is registered in the same herd book as the modern-type Braunvieh, but has different breeding aims. Efforts to preserve the original Braunvieh type have been undertaken in Germany since 1988.
*The breed is often confused with the Brown Swiss, a strain of cattle that has been developed from the Braunvieh cattle that were exported to the USA. Several other cattle breeds have been developed from Braunvieh cattle, because of their attractive genetic traits.
*The Braunvieh is a uniform brown or grey-brown in colour; the nose is black and encircled by a pale ring. Although varying in shades of brown, they usually have pale hair around the muzzle with a black nose. Their udders and inner legs are a very light brown colour, while the shoulders, tail switch and neck can be darker in colour. They are a horned breed with the horns being pale with dark points. The switch of the tail is dark brown to black. The skin is pigmented, the muzzle is black, and the hooves are dark and very hard.
*Cows weigh 550–750 kg at a withers height of 138–152 cm; bulls weigh 1000–1300 kg.
*Their legs are well-formed, reducing foot problems. Many breeders claim this is a result of generations of Braunvieh cattle being raised in tough mountainous Alpine regions.
*They can adapt well to most weather conditions, since their coat changes in varying climates. Their hair grows sleeker and fine during warm summers and can thicken during the winter months. Their skin is also pigmented, meaning that skin cancer is unlikely.
*Their mothering instincts are well-developed, and dams are known to protect and feed not only their own calves, but the offspring of other herd members. This protective nature can be good for the welfare of calves.
*In Europe, the Braunvieh are still primarily used for milk production whilst in a number of other countries their beef traits have been highlighted and used.

*Approximately 130 head of Braunvieh were imported into USA from Switzerland between 1869 and 1880. These animals formed the nucleus for the development of the American Brown Swiss. American Brown Swiss has since spread to Canada, Mexico and other Latin countries. In the mid-nineteen hundreds, they were imported by Mexico where they have flourished as a beef breed. They are used in a commercial capacity to upgrade the beef characteristics of Zebu cattle.
*Braunvieh are various shades of brown, predominately mousy brown, but ranging from light brown with gray to very dark brown.
*The border of the muzzle is very light, as is the poll, and often a lighter colored dorsal stripe is seen.
*The udder and inside of the legs and underline are also a lighter shade.
*A darker, smokier shading is often evident around the shoulders and neck compared to the rest of the body.
*The switch of the tail is dark brown to black.
*The skin is pigmented, the muzzle is black, and the hooves are dark and very hard.
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CALVING CAPABILITY

The ultimate reason for supporting a cow is to have her produce a calf on a regular, at least annual, basis. This quarter, I have included some of the main traits we consider are important when selecting a fertile, feminine and maternal cow. If a cow is producing a good, well grown calf every year, then I don't believe that age is a significant reason for culling her and definitely not if she is passing on her genetics to her offspring. I have been told of many high producing cows that have produced a calf annually until they are at least 20 years old. The aim of a breeding cow is to produce a strong, healthy calf that displays the positive traits of both parents.
Calving ease is a critical factor, especially in our open range country, where it is not possible to see your cows every day or week for that matter. We rely on the cows to be able to calve without any assistance and produce a good strong, healthy calf that is going to survive and so much of this is down to the hind quarter confirmation of the cow. A sloping rump is a good, easy to see indicator of a cow that will calve easily. I had dairy farmer neighbours who needed to view their cows at least

once during the middle of the night and several times through the day when their cows were calving to ensure that the cows calved or alternatively needed help. They also had to pull many calves and always had one or more cows in the barn recovering from after calving paralysis. The main problem primarily with most of these dairy cows was that their pin bones were too high, and their thurl was back to far. This meant that when calving, the calf was pushing uphill to get out of the cow as shown in figure 3 below. These cows certainly did not have a sloping rump. At least some of these faults are genetic whilst others can be attributed to these cows not getting the butterfat and oil in their diet as calves, causing a lack of skeletal development.

Once a calf is conceived there are still a lot of factors to consider in ensuring a safe birth.

The desirable features for this trait include:

- Low angular hips.
- A long maternal, concave rump showing a dip through the plates.
- Wide pins and low thurl situated in the centre of the back end of the animal. The angle from the pins to the thurl and the thurl to the hooks (top of the hip bone) should be 45 degrees.
- Angular hind-quarters and a reduced frame stature will help eliminate many structural defects and calving difficulties.
- The vulva should be straight up and down.
- An animal with high pin bones will lead to poor drainage of the cervix, high hooks and thurls are thus pushed back reducing the overall pelvic area. There are also muscular, convex shaped rumps that lead to calves being born with a muscular rump which increases the chances of hip lock during birth.
- A cow should have a calf that is 7% - 8% of her body weight and will wean a calf that is 55% of her body weight or more.
- Always check to ensure that the calves have a navel cord at birth and that they are quickly on their feet and suckling. Good cows will consistently produce calves that do these things.
- An extremely high chine in bulls can lead to calving problems, especially in beef cattle, because of too much neck extension leading to a longer gestation and increased birth weight so there is an optimum height for the chine which will vary between beef and dairy breeds.

The figures show how the variations in the angles between the pins and thurl and thurl and hip will have a major influence on the whole confirmation of the rear end and the calving channel in a cow.

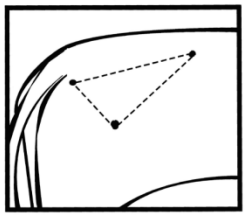

FIGURE 1

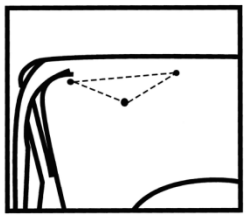

FIGURE 2

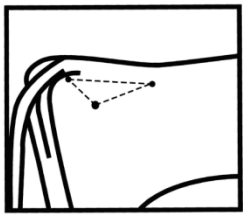

FIGURE 3

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Thank you for your continued interest in our newsletters, our website and our book. Please feel free to order one of our books and become familiar with the CLMS system and the directions we are taking in the overall scheme of animal and food production for human consumption

PLEASE FEEL FREE TO CONTACT US ABOUT ANY ITEMS IN THIS NEWSLETTER, ON OUR WEBSITE OR IN OUR BOOK. WE WELCOME PRODUCER INPUT AND INTEREST AND WANT TO INVOLVE YOU IN WHAT WE ARE DOING.

As I stated earlier, I have included the following letter from one of our readers to provide another perspective from years of breeding and experience. I hope that it provides some discussion regardless of your own personal thoughts on the topic and stimulates, challenges, encourages, motivates etc. you in whatever way you choose.

Hello Gerald,
Quite frequently you have solicited feedback and opinions from your reader base. Please allow me to comply.
The following are my experiences, observations and opinions.
For many years I have bred cattle (Poll Herefords) conforming to the industry standard, that being constant out breeding, whilst taking in account the Breed Plan figures in any planned breeding programme. This has been my modus operandi for the past 20 years.
My observation and conclusions after 20 years of the above mentioned programme:-

1. The system, modus operandi has been less than successful in my view: for the following reasons:

i) Failure to stabilise or fix a type.
ii) Failure of bulls to predominately replicate their phenotype in their offspring. I consider this a major disappointment and failure in the programme.
iii) The irritating regularity of the EBV'S to accurately predict the appearance or the traits of the progeny.

Thus after 20 years of breeding I have failed to fix my preferred "type".
Conclusion: The programme has been less than successful, one could even say, unsuccessful.

This led me to question the programme and for the very first time seriously consider the alternate to endless out breeding and EBV's. That alternate being linebreeding.
I believe I have carried out extensive research in this area. Initially, I found it quite difficult to uncover information in reference to line breeding, particularly amongst the mainstream cattle industry breeders. What I discovered, and believe to still exist today, is the immediate rejection and condemnation of line breeding.
The major concern and reason for this I believe is self-interest. If line breeding was to gain a foothold in Australia, the number of bulls sold annually would be decimated by up to as much as 50% or quite possibly more.
Just some of the questions I asked myself and others.
Over-all, have we improved our cattle since the advent of EBV's?
Have we fixed a type?
Have we made any sustainable genetic progress?
Have EBV's enabled breeders to concentrate their genetic selections on the growth, carcass and milk traits at the expense of the less visible or measurable maternal traits?

Are Herefords or all British bred cattle for that matter, terminal or maternal? Bearing in mind current parent verification and breed integrity issues, how relevant and accurate are EBV's? Expanding further on this point, has the relentless pursuit of ever improving Breed Plan figures played a role in the current breed integrity question. If so, this aiding and abetting of the mongrelisation of the Hereford breed needs to be addressed.
Are EBV's a marketing tool masquerading as hard science?

Some answers to the above questions.
Breeding is an art – not a science.
There are breeders and there are multipliers.
Fire and ice matings do not work, sustainable genetic progress is made in small sustainable improvements, generation by generation.
Anyone can read figures on a table – it takes a real breeder to "breed" cattle. This ability to breed is acquired through years of experience, both good and bad. In my opinion, Breed Plan attempts to disregard this slow acquisition of knowledge with the lure of immediate knowledge and gratification through the use of EBV's.
Have EBV's replaced the show ring as the parading venue of choice for animals which have no role to play in the cattle industry going forward.
Enough on my thoughts regarding EBV's for the time being.

Linebreeding:

My research led me to closely scrutinize the linebreeding principles and philosophies of the following:
Line 1 Herefords: USA
Lents Herefords: USA
Victor Dominoes: USA
Pinebark Angus: NZ
Shoshone Angus: USA.
The mark of a true breeder is one who has selected and settled on a type (regardless of what others think) and the ability of their bulls to replicate themselves with a high degree of accuracy and repetition.
I now believe the only way to achieve this goal is through the principles of linebreeding.
With the introduction of a never ending additional genetic base deleting the prepotency of the male progeny and the widening of the genetic base, the more readily promoted continual outcrossing method of breeding is fundamentally flawed, and as a result, doomed to mediocre results – in my opinion.
Furthermore, in my opinion, EBV's are only capable of both accurate and high repeatability if they are describing the seed stock from a line bred programme, where the genetic base has been both narrowed and stabilized. This being the case fully illustrates the folly of EBV's. I personally don't know of any that come from a line bred programme in the Hereford breed in Australia. This is not to say there are none, just none I am aware of. The vast majority are the result of a programme that promotes an ever widening of the genetic base and a decreasing of the stabilisation of the chosen type.
The common criticism of linebreeding is the hue and cry referring to a train wreck in terms of phenotype anomalies either personally observed or constantly communicated, through the grapevine.
Progeny which display any anomalies at all are not a condemnation of the linebreeding programme, more a sad

indictment on the genetic base used in the linebreeding programme/experiment. Some (most) animals are so genetically flawed, they are unsuitable to be used in any linebreeding programme.
However, most who have dabbled or experimented with linebreeding have concluded it a disaster and unworkable with the high incidence of anomalies.
I repeat, the linebreeding programme is not at fault, the genetic base chosen is the problem. With the ever increasing mongrelisation of the Hereford breed, it is little wonder most people have had a train wreck when they have dabbled in linebreeding. It is much easier to condemn the process in preference to condemning one's own genetic base.
It is my view, the only way to halt the continued mongrelisation of the Hereford breed is through the widespread acceptance and uptake of linebreeding by a majority of breeders.

Artificial Insemination:

Never has a breeding programme been more aptly named. Personally, A.I. is my pet hate in any breeding programme. It is with very good reason the adjective "Artificial" is used at the front of this programme. The whole process is artificial, from artificial selection, artificial nutrition, artificial cycling, artificial care, artificial calving and finally once the calf is born artificial feeding in order to achieve artificial EBV's. Allow me to expand the above statements.

1. Artificial Selection. Normally only the "best" cows are chosen for an AI programme or even worse still – embryo flushing programme. What are the criteria used for determining the "best" cow or cows. More often than, not EBV's. Unfortunately, the same applies to the sires chosen – usually on the strength of their EBV's. Train wreck meets train wreck – result not too surprisingly – a train wreck.
2. Artificial Nutrition. When chosen or selected, the cow or cows are quite frequently drafted from their contemparies and their nutrition closely monitored and managed in order to improve the chances of a successful programme. Would these cows have cycled naturally? We will never know.
3. Artificial Cycling. Large doses of hormones and once again, would these cows have cycled naturally? We will never know.
4. Artificial care. Expensive embryos, cows and semen seem to demand and receive special treatment.
5. Artificial Calving. Do breeders intervene earlier and more readily when monitoring and managing the calving process of those expensive cows, embryos and semen?
6. Artificial feeding. The creep feeding of the progeny in order to maximise the full potential of these expensive calves and to realise their EBV expectations.

Another unwanted side effect of AI programmes is the ease in which breeders can import genetics into their herds. This often results in 10 straws of bull X, 20 straws of bull Y and so on. Quite frequently, I have noticed a sire battery of 10-40 bulls in a given joining season. In my opinion, this practice is aiding and abetting the further mongrelisation of the Hereford breed. Nothing disappoints me more in any programme than to witness breeders simply multiplying the AI wonder of the month to a cow who herself was the result of the previous AI wonder of the month.
With the ease of A.I. and embryo flushing, many herds have departed from the tried and proven programme of population genetics to multiplying both dams and sires from an ever decreasing number of cow families.
We have all heard many clichés with regards to cattle breeding:

i) The best cattle are not found behind the white fences and carefully manicured gardens.
ii) The best cattle are not found on hobby farms.
iii) The best cattle are not found on non AI programmes – ones cattle must be "fashionably" bred.
iv) The best cattle are not found on farms that do not chase the latest and best genetics worldwide.

All of the above comments are false in my opinion.
The best cattle are purely and simply found behind the best breeding programmes, and in my opinion all good breeding programmes/philosophies are either solely or largely based on a principle of linebreeding.
In conclusion, once again I state the above is only my opinion, for whatever it is worth.
I encourage any and all correspondence, both negative and positive. I enjoy debating various programmes.
I thank you for this opportunity to air my thoughts.
Regards and best wishes,
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