**THE**

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**EDITORIAL**

Welcome to out mid-year newsletter. I hope all is as good as possible with you all and that your hard work is being rewarded, though probably not to the extent that you would like given the variables in our industry.

I recently had the privilege of hearing an officer from MLA (Meat and Livestock Australia) giving a group of producers an update on the latest developments for identifying meat quality. Most of the paths that MLA are going down with this work is in the early stages at present, but it is interesting to see the number of different machines and techniques they are currently trialling or about to trial. Those present at this workshop were given an update as to where the various trials were at now and what potential they had for the future. There were some very interesting systems being considered that would provide some very useful data if they work. Variations of ultra sound scanners, MRI scanners and CT scanners were among the equipment being trialled as well as some specialised equipment that has been developed overseas for animal (though not necessarily specifically originally for cattle) identification and assessing.

There is going to need to be quite a lot of adaption necessary for machines such as MRI scanners, which have been used successfully with lamb carcases, but currently would not be large enough to handle cattle carcases.

I guess one of the things that this work is not really considering is the identification of quality meat on the hoof. Being able to quickly identify and measure quality on the hook is certainly a step forward and will hopefully help to add more objectivity to the MSA (Meat Standards Australia) grading system currently being used in the industry in Australia. It is currently possible to trace stock that have high quality meat under a meat quality assessment system on the hook to their family of origin and identify their sires and dams so that breeders can use those sires and dams as a basis to developing higher meat quality carrying herds in the future. However, this will be time consuming and also will become more difficult as we continue to enlarge the gene pools behind our herds. I have added a little more from this workshop later in the newsletter.

**WHAT’S (BEEN) HAPPENING**

\*We attended Beef 2018 at Rockhampton Showgrounds from the 7th. – 11th. May. The first two days were very quiet on our stand, but things picked up considerably for the remaining three days. Overall, there wasn’t quite as much interest as we have had at the last couple of beef week events. However, it was a worthwhile exercise for us and the linear measuring demos certainly attracted plenty of interest on most occasions that we held them. We would like to thank Albert Hancock and Jesse Zischke for providing some quiet animals for us to measure. Our stand featured a range of displays explaining the CLMS system. I would like to also thank Albert and Clair and Mike O’Brien for the time they spent on the stand assisting with explaining the system to interested visitors. We would like to thank everyone who took the time to call in and see us.

\*We shared our stand with Warren Matotek from SweetPro feed supplements and this added more interest and variety to the stand. Our thanks also to Warren for his support and assistance during the week.

\* The field days we held in early April were quite successful despite the numbers being quite light on at Gerogery. I would like to thank Ian and Jill Coghlan of the Eurambie Red Poll and Shorthorn stud for their hospitality and for making their cattle and property available for the day at Gerogery. Whilst it was a small group, there was plenty of interest and sharing that took place.

\* The Yass field day was very well attended by over 20 producers which was very encouraging as was the enthusiasm and interest shown by those who attended. I would also like to thank Mark and Mandy Wales of the Alloura Angus stud for their hospitality and enthusiasm with which they supported us in so many ways. Thank you also to them for allowing us to use their property and cattle to demonstrate our system. On both properties, the cattle were very well presented and a credit to their owners. They also allowed us to show the traits that we look for in cattle very well.

\* I would like to thank both Albert Hancock and Doug Paton for attending the field days and assisting with the presentations. They both travelled long distances and I know their input and experience was appreciated by those who attended. We also had our company chairman Bruce Campbell and Roger Burns, another shareholder in our company at the Gerogery day to add their knowledge and experience to the day.

\* I had the pleasure of accepting an invitation to attend a field day at the Paringa Feedlot between Capella and Clermont in late May to view the cattle that had been participating as entrants in the Clermont Show Cattle Committee Cattlemen’s Challenge. This event sees cattle judged on their weight gain on grass before they then enter the feedlot and their weight gain on grain is also measured. There were ten entrants from local producers, who each entered a pen of 5 cattle each. The day started with the owners of the cattle selecting 3 cattle to be judged on the hoof at the Clermont Show the following week, one being selected as the entrant in the carcase section of the show and the other one being culled at this stage of the competition. The carcase part of the event included an assessment by MLA for meat quality, an assessment of meat and eating quality by a panel of judges and similarly by members of the community. I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to assess the cattle going into the carcase competition for meat quality using our system after they were selected by their owners at the feedlot.

\* 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.

\*Our plan to hold another 5day evaluation course in Central Qld. at Clermont on July the 9th – 13th. has had to be postponed because there were not enough people who registered. In the end we had 6 people who indicated they would attend so I apologise to those people for not being able to go ahead at this stage. We did have around 15 – 16 people who apologised because the dates clashed with other commitments they had. I hope we can find another date in the not to distant future to go ahead with the course. We need 10 people to make the course profitable and effective for us to run and at the same time keep the cost to each individual as low as possible.

\*As an alternative to a 5 day course later in the year, we may hold one day workshops in Clermont and Charters Towers in late October/Nov. if we find suitable sites. This will also assist us to gauge interest in future longer courses.

\*If we don’t hold courses later this year at Clermont and in central NSW, we will certainly work on something in the first part of next year. Any suggestions for suitable dates in these areas would be appreciated. We don’t want to clash with major local attractions.

\*We now have linear measuring callipers available for sale for $100.00 plus freight so if you are interested, please let me know.

\*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.

\*The bi-annual Coodardie (Northern Territory) bull and heifer sale will be held on Wed. August 15th. 2018. The O’Brien’s would welcome any interstate visitors to the sale and are happy to assist with accommodation arrangements etc.

Phone - 0889754460 or Moira – 0428474262.

\*If any other clients are having sales etc. and would like me to put them in the newsletter, please let me know the details.

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**BREED OF THE QUARTER**

**BLONDE D’AQUITAINE**

The Blonde d'Aquitaine breed originates from the south west of France, embracing the area of the Garonne Valley and the Pyrenees Mountains. As their name indicates, they come from the Aquitaine district in France. The breed was created in 1962 by merging three blonde breeds of south-western France, the Blonde de Quercy, the Garonnaise and the Blonde des Pyrénées. There may also be a touch of other white coloured breeds from nearby regions. These breeds were all used and well regarded as draught animals and as such, had developed large eye muscles and rump and their long, strong backs made them an excellent breed for natural selection and genetic superiority. They were always hardy lean animals with light but strong bone structures and as you would expect, very quiet.

From the early 70’s onwards, much greater efforts were made to improve the beef production aspects of the breed and especially as draught cattle were generally replaced by tractors apart from very steep or similarly inaccessible country.

The Blonde d'Aquitaine is the third most popular beef breed in France by numbers, after the [Charolais](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charolais_(cattle)) and the [Limousin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limousin_(cattle)). Over the last 40+ years they have been exported to many countries around the world. Blondes were introduced to Australia via semen and embryos in 1975. In that year, there were 281 calves registered by 16 studs.

They are mainly a wheat or cream-colour, which can vary from a dark to very light fawn. The area around the eyes and the muzzle is usually lighter in colour. The skin is white. They usually have lighter pigmentation around the muzzle, belly, shins and the inner side of the legs. Some strains of Blonde are naturally horned, but many bloodlines have been bred as polled. Bulls can reach a weight of about 1,100kg, and cows usually weigh around 800kg. Generally speaking, they are a relatively docile breed with a calm temperament.

Their feed conversion efficiency and foraging skills are very good. Blondes often convert feed to weight at about 6 kg. of feed per kg. of gain, whereas many other breeds require around 8 kg. of feed per kg. Calves have been known to gain about 1.4 kg. per day while growing. The breed has a good ratio of meat against waste products like fat and bone, and their carcasses yield high amounts of beef.



Ease of calving is considered to be of a high standard and they have a great record for unassisted birthing processes at around 93.9%. Calves generally have low birthweights, but muscle up at around two weeks of age.

Blondes are well known for their heat tolerance and have proven themselves in the hottest Queensland climates, (and the cold of Tasmania and New Zealand). They are found flourishing in hot and humid climates all over the world.

In summary, Blondes feature the following assets:

* Easy calving
* Quiet temperament
* Heavy muscle
* Heat tolerant
* Tremendous length
* Great hybrid vigour
* Good weaning weight
* Usually high yield carcasses
* Competitive dressings percentages
* Good profits for breeders and butcher.



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**Moving ahead with quality**

To follow on from the comments in the editorial, I was able to ask the speaker from MLA at the field day/workshop at Clermont when we might see the DEXA system of meat assessment being used in the cattle industry. He explained that it is currently being used successfully in more than one abattoir for lambs and that it is only a matter of time before it will be capable of identifying the saleable meat yield in cattle.

DEXA is able to identify the quantities of meat, bone and fat in each carcase and the end aim is to pay producers for the saleable meat in a carcase. There is currently one abattoir starting to use DEXA and adapt it for cattle.

As I’ve said previously, this method of payment would be the biggest step available to improve the quality of meat in our retail outlets today. It should also ensure that breeders who are breeding high meat to bone and fat yields will be rewarded suitably for doing so.

I see one of the greatest challenges in implementing these changes will be to have DEXA as part of every abattoir’s production line. Those abattoirs who don’t have it will not (or should not) be able to compete with processors who are paying a premium for high yielding cattle. Introduction of this system will mean that breeders will need to put less emphasis on large boned animals that, whilst may end up weighing a lot. will not, as a rule, have the same meat quality. Our own research over many years has shown that big, large boned animals are not necessarily going to produce high quality meat. A lot of it, probably, but lacking in quality. We have also found that the shape of the bone in these larger boned animals is more likely to be less flat than in their smaller boned counterparts. I have also already mentioned in an earlier newsletter about the optimum size of an animal to most efficiently utilise its endocrine system in terms of feed conversion rates.

We have also had a small number of cattle bones tested for density that we had graded using our system of bone shape relating to tenderness and found that the denser bones were usually more likely to be flat or concave in shape. I have also discussed this topic with a vet who uses a bone densitometer to measure the bone density in race horses for some of the leading trainers and they won’t contract to train horses that don’t have dense bones. Density is related to the cell structure of the bone and these trainers have identified that horses with bigger, coarse bones are more likely to break down during training than their finer boned counterparts.

As I stated earlier in the editorial, whilst there is a lot of research being done to identify the quality of meat on the hook, there seems to be less work being done to identify it on the hoof.

Certainly, at the moment we have EBV’S. However, there doesn’t seem to be a lot of research at present to see how cattle that score well on EBV’S actually grade on the hoof. There is also a number of breeders that we have encountered during our workshops etc. that question the value of EBV’S as a reliable method of identifying high quality animals. I have also had this sentiment expressed by at least one person involved in industry research. Until we find a pathway for identifying high quality meat on the hoof and then being able to follow it through and verify it on the hook, we are still well away from making the industry truly accountable and creditable.

Whilst I am aware of some work being undertaken at the official industry research level, it would seem that a disproportionate number of resources are being funnelled into on the hook identification in comparison to the live animal identification. Whilst our company have severe financial restraints in regard to the amount we can afford to put into the type of research necessary to improve on the hoof identification, we are working hard to encourage funding from the private sector into research to improve the current methods of live cattle identification. We believe that our system has, at the very least, a very sound foundation to build a system that could be acceptable to the whole industry. It probably goes without saying that any live evaluation system of the future will incorporate some form of electronic identification, possibly using 3D imagery or similar. We are currently discussing some possibilities with a company, but it is very early in the formative stages at present and may yet be another dry gully. However, we will keep persevering because we are committed to improving the way we can identify quality aspects of our cattle herd. The challenge we face is being able to either convert the touch or feeling parts of our system into objectively assessable data.

One of the paths we are following is to find other ways of identifying the things that we feel or finding other visual indicators that the animal may exhibit that can be directly linked to the things that we feel to indicate different traits. We know we can get a measurable image of bone shape using ultrasound, but unfortunately this method of identification has not been as readily accepted as we initially thought it might. However, it is not out of the question that it may fit better into some of our future developments in terms of electronic identification. Some of you will also be aware of the visual identification program proposal that we have had on the drawing board for a number of years now just waiting for funding to develop.

It is our aim to continue to pursue ways of improving and quantifying our system to reduce the subjectivity current in all methods of live animal evaluation and the more support we can receive from the private sector and grass roots breeders and producers, the sooner I am sure something will happen.

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**ASKING OURSELVES**

I’ve been thinking about adding a section in one of our recent newsletters that is more about stimulating (I hope) your thought processes around the industry than just writing stuff for you to read and either agree with or not and then forget about it. It’s likely that some of the questions that follow will be ones that you have already asked yourselves probably many times. I know you are all very committed to the industry and so I hope I am not insulting you by asking you to give even more thought to what is happening in our industry and your business. Unfortunately, the producers who would benefit most and probably do less towards moving the industry and their own enterprise forward do not ask themselves these questions as much as you do or as much as they need to. As in most facets of life and business, there is 5 - 10% of the people involved who are the leaders in innovation and change. Some of the rest will follow along later and a few will never change.

If anyone would like to respond to any of the below, your comments would be most welcome and if it stimulates enough response, it would be good to share them in a later newsletter. I would like these newsletters to contain more input from others so that we can learn and share more from each other. In other words, that’s another way of me saying that I sometimes struggle to come up with topics that may even slightly interest you. I would be happy to accept topics or comments in dot point form to add to the newsletter.

The following are some of a range of questions to ask :-

1. How has the industry changed over time:

a)positively?

b)negatively?

2. What do you see as the ideal pathway forward for the industry?

3. Who is responsible for getting there?

4. Accountability within the industry – where does it start and who controls it?

5. It that responsibility currently in the right hands?

6. If not, how can this be changed?

7. What are you doing in your business that works? Especially if you have changed some of your management strategies and they have worked.

8. How do you implement change in your enterprise? Do you start with a smaller trial and work from there or has some other method worked for you?

9. Are things like consistency, repeatability and adaptability important in your enterprise and how do you go about achieving them?

10. What are the environmental influences that are most influential on your property and how do you adapt your planning to work with them to achieve the best outcome?

11. What is working best for you with your enterprise right now?

12. What is working least for you now in your enterprise and what score would you give it out of ten where 10 is perfect?

13. What do you need to do to get that score from where it is now to the next score e.g. from a 3 to a 4? Small steps = big result.

14. What can you do to improve the balance in you’re a) business and b) own quality of life?

Thank you for bearing with me in the above. I would also appreciate some feedback in regard to what we are doing as a company. How could we improve our service and encourage more breeders to at least listen to what we are promoting regardless as to whether it may suit their enterprise or not.

1. What would improve our system overall?
2. What would improve the system to increase its objectivity?
3. How easy or not is the system for you to follow?
4. What makes sense and what doesn’t?
5. What is the most difficult part of the system for you to understand?
6. Are the ways we pass the system on to others clear enough and easy enough to understand?
7. How can we communicate better?

Thank you for following through this section and I look forward to hearing some responses though I appreciate how valuable your time is.

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**THE CLERMONT SHOW CATTLEMEN’S CHALLENGE - 2018**

As I mentioned earlier, I had the privilege of being able to grade the steers in the above carcase competition prior to them being processed using our evaluation system. I haven’t received the official feedback sheets as yet from the DPI & F but have seen the results and I have attached these. I graded all but 2 of the steers on both the jaw and rib to see what the variation was and if it was also different with the other methods of assessment used. These other methods of assessment included the standard MLA carcase quality assessment, a taste test with professional taste testers and a taste test by a panel selected from consumer patrons at the show.

The most difficult assessment from our perspective was feeling the rib for bone shape because of the fat cover on the rib so consequently that could be the reason that the rib grades are generally slightly lower than the jaw.

We would like to congratulate the winners of the competition and the organisers who worked so hard to make this very worthwhile event possible. It has been an annual event for many years now and let’s hope it continues.

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.**

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