THE HORMONAL MAIL

THE OFFICIAL QUARTERLY
NEWSLETTER OF
CLASSIC LIVESTOCK
MANAGEMENT SERVICES.

NUMBER 62

October 2021

MANAGEMENT SERVICES

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to our October newsletter. It's certainly a change to be able to write when the cattle industry in Australia is experiencing such record high prices. I hope that the same applies in other countries around the world. Usually there is a reason why prices increase and that is for a reduction of supply. In Australia, that reason is for the devastating drought that many production areas have experienced in recent years. This also has the side effect for producers of being in the dilemma of whether to rebuild their herd and pay the high prices currently occurring or hold off until prices ease and look at other ways to obtain an income. Those producers fortunate to have been able to either drought proof their properties, at least to some degree, or not be in drought affected areas, have been able to capitalise on the high prices. Usually, history tells us that when one region is suffering then another is benefiting and usually the ups and downs level out over time. The more we can consider ways of evening out the variations of nature without totally impacting on it, the better off we will all be,

For those who are rebuilding their herds, I just wanted to highlight the importance of having a solid selection process and most importantly, give priority to what you value in your herd. In other words, what are the things you consider are the most important components you want in your herd. I have put a process in an earlier newsletter and in our book "A Vision Tender" about how you can do this that gives some guidelines on how to make these decisions. It mainly involves making a list of the main traits that you are looking for in your herd and then prioritising and quantifying them. Just to give an example, your list could read something like as follows or similar: Fertility, calving percentage, meat quality, milk quality, weight gain, reproductive capacity. Make your own list and then ask which is the most important and compare with the others until you develop a hierarchy of importance so you can then start selecting for the first trait and so on.

WHAT'S (BEEN) HAPPENING

* I guess the biggest and also most disappointing decision we have had to make is to postpone the 5 day evaluation course we were hoping to hold from the 18th. Oct. The uncertainty that is the result of the COVID – 19 restrictions has forced us to make this decision to, amongst other things, allow those who had indicated their intention to attend to reschedule their next month or so. Apart from the volatility of the overall COVID – 19 situation, the current information we had was that the breeders from NSW who were coming would not be able to attend and apart from this we did need the 4 – 5 people from there to make up the numbers to justify holding the course.

*Despite the above, we are determined to hold the course in Clermont in March or April next year when we hope that with vaccinations etc, borders will be fully re-opened again. I have spoken with the Clermont saleyards and show society and as soon as their dates for next year are finalised, we will be able to book the facilities and advise you all of the new dates. I would like to thank you for your patience in this matter and hope that all of you who had intended to attend will still be able to do so and anyone else who would like to attend would be most welcome to do so.

*The recent increase again in COVID – 19 lock downs have continued to make travel difficult for us. We have not been able to visit New South Wales so apologise to those breeders in that state that we were hoping to catch up with in September. Let's hope that restrictions will ease soon so we can catch up with how things are going for everyone.

*Just to repeat, we are still very keen to hold more one day field days over the next few months as soon as border restrictions etc. are lifted. 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.

*Coodardie Brahman bulls are now available for private sale and an online catalogue is available on their website – www.coodardie.com.au.

*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.

EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

*We also remain happy to promote sales for other breeders and would like to put them in the newsletter, so please let me know the details.

Bull Fertility – Is bigger better?

At the risk of boring you all to tears, I just wanted to highlight something that I have been emphasising for many years and it is directly related to current times when many producers are rebuilding their herds. The reason I am raising this topic again, albeit briefly, is that I get a little frustrated when I continue to read articles that only highlight scrotal size as the key to high fertility. Certainly, it is a factor to consider, both circumference and length. Fortunately, many studs present semen quality data as part of their catalogue information for their bull sales and this should take the guess work out of fertility levels for buyers, However, there are still a lot of bulls sold that have not been semen tested and to judge fertility on scrotum size alone is very misleading. The bottom line is that if a bull doesn't have epididymis, then he won't get you any calves. A good indicator is that when you are looking at a bull in the yards or paddock, if you can see his epididymis from at least 10 feet away, then you can be fairly confident that he will serve at least 50 – 60 cows in the first cycle.

Having said that, there are times when it is difficult to see the epididymis clearly and you actually need to feel the testicles to identify

whether they are present or not, However, I believe that if you have to do this that whilst he will probably get cows in calf, his capacity to serve reasonable numbers in the first cycle will be limited, This happens when the epididymis are off to one side or the other on the bottom of the testicles or are flatter and more spread out on the testicles. They ideally should be a nice even walnut shape and the more prominent the better. Remember that the epididymis are where the semen are stored immediately prior to ejaculation so without them there is no storage capacity available.

Another easy to observe indicator for bull fertility is the position of the hair on the top knot. I was wandering through the cattle pavilions at Beef Week 2021 when I saw one of the biggest bulls at the show and could see from some distance that the hair on his top knot was visibly standing upright, an indicator of low fertility. This bull had been judged as one of the best by the show judges given the number of ribbons hanging on his stall. The hair position prompted me to then look at his scrotum and there were no visible signs of his epididymis. I couldn't put him in a crush to verify that. However, I would not breed from him. I might eat him though it would have been difficult to feel his back rib for tenderness because of the fat covering.

These are just a couple of quick easy things to observe when selecting a bull to breed from before you start looking for other indicators such as overall masculinity, thick neck, coarse head and neck hair, broad shoulders and large heart girth and all the linear measurements.

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BREED OF THE QUARTER. RED POLL

Red Poll cattle originated in England as a dual-purpose breed. They originated as a cross between the now extinct Norfolk Red beef-type cattle and Suffolk Dun dairy cattle. The Norfolk was a small, hardy, red and white horned breed known for the high quality of its beef. The Suffolk was a red, yellow, or brindle polled dairy breed. The resulting Red Poll breed was recognized in 1846. The parent Suffolk breed was a polled breed whereas the Norfolk cattle had horns. The gene for horns was bred out in the Red Poll breed. Some of you may have noticed that when you use a Red Poll bull over other breeds of cattle you will get the occasional brindle calf, a throwback to their Suffolk ancestors.

It is not definitely known when the two breeds were first crossed, or what infusions of blood may have been from other breeds. Galloway Cattle and Devons were brought into the area, and, no doubt, some of this breeding found its way into what later was called the Red Polled Breed.

The original name for the breed, adopted in 1863, was Norfolk and Suffolk Red Polled cattle and the first standard description was agreed upon in 1873. This led to the first herd book being compiled in 1874. The breed became the Red Polled in 1883 and then Red Poll in 1888, when the Red Poll Cattle Society was formed.

The red cattle from this region could well be ancestors of cattle taken to the south of England by the Romans when they invaded England between 43 and 80 AD. Other modern-day breeds such as the Sussex, Lincoln Red, Hereford, Galloway, North and South Devon could all have similar ancestry.

The counties of Suffolk and Norfolk in England, the original homes of the Red Poll lie in a low rather marshy part of England, border the North Sea and have soil that is generally lacking in fertility. Originally, most of the interest in cattle was for their milk producing ability. However, as time progressed, farmers became more interested in the production of meat so their preference moved to cattle with the potential to produce a combination of both good milk production and high-quality carcasses.

Red Poll cattle were imported into Australia in the mid-19th century, where they are now used for beef production.

The first identified breeder in Australia was James Graves, around 1870, although there is evidence of earlier herds.

These cattle were introduced to the United States by G. P. Taber of New York State in 1873. The Red Poll dual-purpose breed is the oldest registered breed in the United States and is celebrating its 125th year. The breed is beginning to be reintroduced into some areas of the western US for the small ranch and backyard beef, as their docile nature makes them easy for the novice to handle.

In 2010, Pfizer Animal Health testing of a Red Poll Bull, Power Hawk (a descendent of Power Walker) tested a minus -2.58 MVP showing he was in top 1% for feed efficiency that indicated that Red Poll Cattle have genetics to improve feed efficiency that is important to profitability and grass finishing ability in a moderate frame.

The Red Poll breed was first brought to New Zealand in 1898, but a herd was not established until 1917, when 22 animals were transported from Australia.

Characteristics

Red Poll cattle are medium in size, with cows averaging 1,200 pounds and bulls 1,800 pounds. The cattle are solid red, with a little white on the underline tolerated but not desired. They are adaptable and long lived. Red Polls have quiet dispositions and they are an excellent choice for rotational grazing and other systems where ease of handling is required. Cows can also be used for small-scale and home dairy production. The milk is high in protein and butterfat, making it especially good for cheese. In England, Red Poll cheese is still produced. The milk has a small fat globule so is the next best to goat's milk if people are allergic to cow's milk.

The beef is fine grained and has won carcase competitions for the most tasty and tender beef as judged by a consumer panel.

Photo courtesy of Lazy S Farm, www.lazysredpoll.com

- Efficient converter of forage requiring little or no additional feed.

- Long lived thus fewer replacements needed.
- Will adapt to single or multiple suckling.
- Will calve to any terminal sire.
- Excellent quality beef
- Naturally polled
- Calm and easy to handle
- Excellent mothers
- Will adapt very well to either extensive (and organic) or intensive systems.

The most concerning fact about the breed is that it is endangered and it is declining in Britain, North America and globally. Large numbers of Red Poll cows are being lost to the population through their use in herds of commercial cattle and in some other breeds. Fortunately, the breed has a great deal to offer. Its long history of pure breeding has given the breed exceptional genetic consistency. Bulls are prepotent, and their offspring are highly predictable and uniform. As stated earlier, they are distantly related to most other beef breeds so they can impart significant hybrid vigour when crossed. The breed was a foundation

breed of the Senepol breed, developed in the 1900s in the Caribbean.

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SELECTING FOR WHAT?

I would like to share some thoughts with you in regard to the wisdom that has or hasn't guided the cattle industry over the years and at the risk of both repeating previous comments and providing some somewhat provoking thoughts that you may not agree with.
I was reading some research recently that came out of a hospital research programme in Massachusetts in the USA. The study had looked at the relationship between the decline in human consumption of omega 3 fatty acids and the increase of mental illnesses including depression. I thought this was also an appropriate topic given the emphasis placed on mental health at present and especially as a fallout from the COVID pandemic.

It adds further strength to the argument in regard to why we need to consider the "whole system" whether it be the human system, the soil system, the cattle system, the plant system etc. It also emphasises both the mind/body relationship as well as the relationship between what we put in our mouths and the impact that it has on our own health. On top of all of that is the importance of each individual getting the balance right for themselves. We need to also ask why we are experiencing the increase, especially in mental health conditions, since the way we process our food has changed over the last 6 – 8 decades, in particular. It is not only the way we process food today, but the environment it is grown in and by that I mean the focus on things like single trait selection, increased weight gain, additives and so on.

It's also appropriate given the work our company has done on considering the way that diet effects the level of fatty acids in meat. Our research (results available on our website – classiclivestock.com with the link to "research") shows that grass fed cattle are higher in omega 3 than grain fed animals. Hence, I relate back to the "wisdom" of using grain as a major meat producing feed and at the same time acknowledging that sometimes, especially during drought, there is nothing else to feed our cattle with. However, an old timer made a very pertinent comment to me many years ago and that was that "if cattle were meant to eat grain, Mother Nature would have given them beaks".

Another factor that cannot be ignored is the influence that synthetic hormones is having on the cattle industry. Whilst their use increases the potential to increase daily weight gains considerably, it also puts additional needs on an animal's digestive system, usually at the expense of some other part of their functioning system, particularly their immune system.

When the digestive system isn't able to function in the way it was designed to, other systems and especially the animal's immune system suffer and that ends up costing the producer money. Cattle become more susceptible to a whole range of sicknesses, disease and stress. What we need to obtain is, again, balance. That is, a balance between the genetics that produce animals that grow exceptionally quickly when given the right feed mixes, usually including additives, and those that will maintain a functional digestive system and overall good health. They may not have the same weight gain figures, but these are more than offset by less health issues, vet bills and deaths.

Another concerning trend is that whilst carcasses are somewhat heavier, i.e. cattle are reaching certain weight goals at a younger age than ever before, their bone out yields have decreased. A recent report I saw indicated that the bone out yield for some grain fed carcasses was as low as 54% as compared with over 60% for grass fed cattle. In fact, both these figures are quite low in comparison with the limited number of measurements in this area that we have done.

Meat yield is so important in assessing the value of an animal, even though it is the biggest rort in the cattle industry today because producers are not paid for the amount of meat their cattle produce (i.e. their bone out yield – meat to bone to fat ratio) but a reduced price of the whole animal or whole carcass. This means there is no incentive for producers to focus their breeding programmes on producing as much meat as possible. It doesn't matter if you have large boned animals. You still get paid for the bone – not really an edible product for human consumption. Fortunately, some of the more laterally thinking researchers in the industry are working on finding ways of easily measuring the bone out yields. We know that our evaluation system does give a good indication of yield because of the work we have done in this area. Some of the carcasses that we have had boned out and then weighed after they graded as a 2 – 2.5 (very tender) on our evaluation system have yielded from 80 – 82% meat to bone and fat compared with the above figures.

Two of the, if not the two, most important structural requirements cattle need to possess to maximise their potential to produce meat on any type of feed whether it be grass, grain or a combination is shoulder width and depth of chest. These are two of the key measurements that Jan Bonsma used when he developed linear measuring. These strong structural features have a much better chance of being present in cattle whose mothers are high in butter fat because butter fat and the butter oil (ghee) in the butter fat is critical for the development of the animal's skeletal structure. If you want proof of this, just compare a dairy cow that has been raised on synthetic milk with a beef cow raised on its mother's milk. Note the difference in shoulder width, and prominence of the chine, hooks and pins on the dairy cow. Whilst dairy cattle ideally have a slightly more angular structure than beef cattle, the lack of butterfat in their growing period magnifies this.

A consistent and even layering of fat throughout the animal's life is also very important whether they be dairy or beef cattle. Variations in quality and quantity of feed that effects the rate of growth of an animal has a detrimental effect on the dispersing of fat within the muscle and can lead to visual lumps of fat on places such as the tail and pins area and shoulders.

The aim is to select for genetics that are going to give you higher yields of meat to fat and bone. The following is an example of what you are missing out on as producers because you are not paid on bone out yield. Steer A is 500 kgs. live weight with a 60% carcass yield (meat to bone/fat) that produces 300 kg. of meat. Steer B is also 500 kg. live weight but has a 70% carcass yield (meat to bone/fat) that produces 350 kg of meat. With that additional 50 kg. at, say conservatively, $6.00/kg, you have increased your income by $300 with just one animal (you can use this as a guide to do your own figures). Currently, buyers have their own way to work out the bone out yield when they are buying and they are not going to err on the side of a high yield. Is this not a great incentive for producers to get together to demand an equitable pricing policy for their product?

Overall, the challenge for all beef producers is, as I mentioned earlier, all about balance. In today's real world, a certain number of cattle need to be fed products other than their natural grass diet so that there is enough production to meet the demands of the world population. Therefore, grain feeding is, by demand, a necessity. What we must be aware of is the importance of maintaining a genetic base of animals that are not genetically modified to only do well in a manufactured environment. Cattle need to be bred to produce on a broad scale in their original natural environment and from there the other environments needed to ensure product supply need to be established to make the best of what these animals present to them. Otherwise, cattle as we know them today will become a thing of the past.

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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.