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**EDITORIAL.**

Welcome to our first newsletter for 2012. On behalf of CLMS I would like to wish you all a peaceful and prosperous 2012. Every year seems to go quicker or maybe it is the speed of technology these days that gives us that impression. I am sure the fact that we are all getting a few more years under our belts couldn’t possibly have anything to do with it!!!

One of the most positive things to come out of Gearld Fry’s trip here in August was his demonstration of linear measuring and the fact that we now have several of the breeders who attended the Nanango Field day starting to use the method to measure their cattle. We have been advocating this system for some time now and it is good to see some of our breeders starting to use it and compare their cattle. This method of measuring cattle was developed by Jan Bonsma, in South Africa and is now used in several countries to compare the balance of various parts of the cattle’s confirmation.

I would like to discuss the role of cattle in the carbon emissions debate a little more in the future. There has been quite a lot of publicity about the amount of methane that cattle emit into the atmosphere and how it adds to the carbon pollution of the air. I must admit I have been somewhat complacent when it comes to following the whole carbon debate. However, it is something that is here to stay so I figure it is something that I need to become somewhat familiar with, at least, and especially now that legislation has been passed that means that there will be compensation for the sequestration of carbon.

In this newsletter I have discussed the importance of soil in our business and soil is one of the main storage places for carbon so I think we need to be aware of how we link soil, grass and cattle in this whole debate.

Our thoughts and prayers remain with Margie and Gearld Fry as Margie continues her courageous battle with cancer.

**WHAT’S HAPPENING**

**\***I have had a look at the latest lot of fat sample results we received recently and they confirm the earlier results from the previous tests we have had done. We have now had 62 samples done in this round of tests and I plan to put them into a research format so that the results can be seen. Over all, on first impressions it would appear that all the grass fed cattle have higher omega 3 levels than any of the grain fed sample. It would also seem that nearly 80% of the cattle that graded as tender using our system were also high in omega 3. We will also look at a couple of other comparisons of interest from the data obtained including the omega3 to omega 6 ratios.

**\***Our company have booked a small site at Beef Week 2012 from May 6th. – 12th. 2012 so we would invite any of you who are attending to drop in and see us. Our site number is 46 in the Walter Pearce Pavilion and we look forward to catching up. At least a couple of our directors from Victoria also plan to attend, so it will be good to have them there as well.

**\*** We would also like to let you know that our good clients from the Coodardie Brahman Stud at Mataranka in the Northern Territory will be holding their annual stud bull and heifer sale on Wednesday the 16th. May and your attendance would be greatly appreciated. Rest assured that despite the long trip, the hospitality more than makes up for it.

Whilst both the last two events will be after our next newsletter, I just wanted to let you know well in advance so that you could make arrangements to attend if possible.

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**SOIL SENSITIVITY**

In the last newsletter, we mentioned that as beef producers, we often tend to not pay as much attention as we might to the milk production side of our animal selection process and particularly not to the butter fat and butter oil levels in our cow’s milk.

In this newsletter, I would like to draw your attention again to another area that is usually not given the respect that it should although everyone who has anything to do with food production will acknowledge that it is the one common denominator that initially all food plants require and that of course is the soil. The soil health industry is a huge business and in terms of publicity and public awareness far outweighs a topic like milk quality in beef animals. However, this has not necessarily meant that it has always been treated in a way that is in the best interests of growing the future world food production requirements.

The first and most important thing for us to understand is that the health of our soil will have a direct impact on the health of every living organism that relies on that soil and what grows in it and that includes human beings.

In recent years, there has been an increasing groundswell of discontent about the way we are treating our soils and it is, finally and importantly, starting to come from eminent people including health professionals, soil agronomists and animal scientists. These professionals are starting to support the individual, pioneering visionaries of the last 3 - 4 decades of the last century who started issuing warnings about the way we were treating our soils and the food that they produced. These were the people who had never lost touch with the real plans of Mother Nature and were committed enough in their own values and belief system not to be swayed by the populous, petro chemical revolution. This is a revolution that has produced a few dictators and little consideration for the humble consumer.

After the 2nd. World War, the drive to get back into serious food production became a top priority throughout the world. There was also a large infrastructure that had been built to support the war effort that was lying idle along with a lot of scientific minds that had been employed to develop arms that would give one country or another an edge in the war. The obvious answer was to combine these assets to rapidly increase international food production. Applied science, on the whole, took over the production of food. This was seen to be the way to increase food production at the rate that it was projected would be required. So the scientists went to work to measure the soil to determine what it needed in each soil type to increase productivity and after short trials, developed synthetic fertilisers to add the required nutrients to the soil to get productivity to where it was assumed to be needed. They also worked diligently to develop pesticides, fungicides and weedicides to reduce the competition for food producing plants. These things together provided the “quick fix” that politicians etc. deemed as necessary to meet the world food shortages and generally this pathway met its aims.

This research and development in the food industry proceeded very much down a one way path, especially in the 5 decades following the 2nd. World War and is still very much in evidence today. I would like to say that we have learned from our mistakes, if I can call them that, but unfortunately that doesn’t appear to be the case. As I mentioned earlier, we are fortunate that we have had visionaries who have stood on an isolated platform and questioned the direction we have taken. Not only have they questioned, they have, more importantly, proposed alternatives and in most cases, until recently, at least, been generally ostracised for doing so.

However, I digress in a sense from the topic of this article to give a little history of how we may have gotten to where we are today in regard to our soil quality. I believe that we have been forced down the path we are on because of the need for speed to grow more food quickly. I believe that the story may have been different if we had stopped to observe nature a little more closely, rather than being caught up in the petro chemical and technological advertising juggernaut. What we need to realise is that nature doesn’t always work as fast as we would like. However, it has a reason(s) for this and until we are prepared to be patient and observe, we will never fully understand it, with or without science.

That is not to say that there has not been a lot of useful information and research come out of what has happened. What we need to do is to take what is relevant and use it to develop a more naturally sustainable food production chain in unison with nature.

There is no doubt that we have been hoodwinked by a few far sighted, but generally greedy people in the petro chemical industries who have taken advantage of the direction that food production has taken over the last few decades. They have convinced us that we must use the artificial products they have produced or we will not survive. We have become so reliant and dependent on them now that it is very difficult to break the chain of production that they have us in. There is a continuing campaign, even now, saying that if we don’t keep using their products, the world will starve and they keep producing new gimmicks backed by advertising that convince us they are right. We currently have the great genetically modified debate as evidence of this direction. Whatever the pros and cons are of this issue, past experience should tell us one undeniable and critical thing about these current developments. That is, that there has been no longitudinal research done on these products. Sure, they have been around for 10 – 15 years now and no harm has come from them or at least that has been made public and I say that in terms of the general public because people like Jeffrey Smith and his organisation have plenty of very concerning evidence about GM products for those who care enough to look into the situation.

We have also documented in our book, “The Vision Tender” and in earlier newsletters examples what has happened to human health over three generations with meat production (breeding for feedlots) and milk production (payment for quantity rather than quality). Remember that these were caused by decisions not necessarily related to the petro chemical industry so we can be even more concerned by what affect that industry may be having on our food.

The fact is that the more we use chemicals in agriculture, the more we become reliant on them and the more we actually lose control of what we are doing on our properties. We become puppets of the multi-national petro chemical companies and their production and distribution network. The reason that we become reliant on these products is because when they are applied to the soil, they start to change the composition of that soil from its natural state. Remember that each individual soil in each geographic location was specifically designed by Mother Nature as part of a natural ecosystem that had a role to play in that system – BALANCE!!!! When we interfere with that system, by adding chemical fertiliser, for example, we don’t only change the soil composition and microbiology, but a whole range of other parts of that ecosystem. Then we have to control those too, so we use more chemicals and so the cycle snowballs.

So often I hear beef producers saying that they have to use this or that lick to supplement nutrients etc. and, in some cases, they are useful. However, when I ask, very few of those producers have worked on the first, and personally what I believe is the obvious starting place, and that, of course, is the soil. Generally speaking, I have found few soils that when treated naturally will not grow the necessary plants to overcome most animal needs in each given ecosystem. When changes are also made to the traditional set stocking grazing method and a system of high density, short time span grazing, or controlled grazing is introduced, then the benefits to soil health quickly become obvious to those who are pioneering the use of these practices.

There are also added bonuses when we consider that a healthy soil with healthy grass coverage will sequester more carbon than any other eco system. As the great carbon debate gets more and more publicity, it is only a matter of time before those producers who are not already aware and looking at changing their management practices will need to do so to take advantage of the incentives that will be offered to those who do. Agriculture, and particularly the beef industry, can end up being the heroes in the great carbon debate if producers realise the true value of their soil and start putting in place practices that will improve it and move it back closer to its original self-supporting and renewing state.

Having said that, I appreciate how deeply entrenched most producer’s are now in using petro chemicals etc. as a major part of their management program. It takes a lot of courage (some would still say, stupidity) to change from the system that nearly all the neighbours are using and to all outward intents and purposes, successfully, to something that doesn’t have all the scientific evidence as yet to support it. The current system, as I have said, also has a huge public relations machine backing it and it is usually easier to go with current popular thought rather than buck the “system”. The key factor that usually prohibits change is usually fear. The fear of what will happen when you do something different. I have discussed fear and change in our book and in earlier newsletters so won’t repeat those thoughts again here. One of the best ways to reduce fear is to obtain as much knowledge and data about any changes as it is possible to do so and to talk to people who have already made some or all of the changes you are considering. I know that from personal experience and from speaking with others who have made changes to a more natural and sustainable production system that once you make the decision to change and start to see the results you only become more confident and convinced that you have made a sound choice.

In conclusion, I would hope that you consider the health of your soil before spending time and money on trying to correct faults further down the food chain. It is not just in terms of what a scientific soil test will tell you, but also from what you observe through the microbiological activity (worms etc.) in that soil, how it feels to touch and walk on and how healthy the plants look that are growing in it.

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**DEVELOPING AN ELITE HERD**

In this section, I would like pass on a few more of the things we discussed with Gearld Fry during his visit to Australia in August. Whether you agree or not with all or some of these thoughts, I thought it might be beneficial to share a bit more because both our CLMS members and Gearld agree that the knowledge we have gained over many years is not ours, but everyone’s and so we are keen to share as much as possible with anyone who is interested in improving the cattle industry.

One of the more obvious features in most herds is their lack of overall confirmation and therefore production consistency. I know consistency is one of our main themes, but it came to the fore again in our discussions with Gearld albeit not as a direct topic, but in what Gearld raised as how he sees the industry going forward in the future. He discussed the importance of being able to identify the most likely animals in your herd that match what your ideal is for your breeding program. Then when you have identified them, cull until you have a small herd of about 5% of your original herd and use those 5% as the basic elite foundation herd to breed your future bulls. This final 5% foundation herd should be very similar in confirmation features. The closer to the same shape and size these elite females are the better.

Of course you need to know what type of animal will be best suited to your environment, what breed you prefer and what markets you are aiming for before you start the culling process. You could refer to Newsletter No. 15 under the article headed “values” and use this process, but substitute your herd values for your own values as in the article as a guide to settling on the above details.

As well as a similar confirmation, the elite cows should also keep their body condition throughout their lives, give plenty of butter fat to their calves and get back into calf again quickly. They should also be able to supply an adequate milk flow for a full 9 – 10 month lactation in an average season. The escutcheon will indicate their ability to do this or not. In these conditions, those cow’s calves should grow into animals which will have at least a 70% utilisation of grass feed into milk.

When you have selected your elite 5% herd, then it is important to find a bull(s) that will improve future generations. If you haven’t currently got a bull that will do that then you may have to purchase one. However, this should only need to be a one off purchase because if you get the right bull he will produce offspring that will replace him and continue to improve your herd.

Ideally, once you have the right bull he will breed his predecessors within that elite herd. This also has the added advantage of tightening the herd gene pool which leads to greater consistency. If you are going to buy in bulls for any length of time, get them from one breeding family to ensure that the gene pool remains more controllable.

When selecting a bull, it is important to have the correct information about his semen quality and this includes 90% + live count, 80% motile – forward swimming cells, a minimum of 1.5 billion cells at 14-16 months and 2 – 6 billion for matured bulls.

Before testing a bull, select for common masculinity traits such as head hair (poll) short, curly, coarse and lying down, a muscular neck crest, wide shoulders and strong, balanced hind quarters. Good testicle shape: a distinct neck, even shape, epididymis directly at base.

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**BREED OF THE QUARTER**

**LOWLINE.**

Lowline cattle are a uniquely Australian developed breed. They were developed as part of a project at Trangie Agricultural Research Centre in New South Wales in 1974 to investigate the implications of selection for growth rate. Low growth rate cows were selected from the Trangie [Angus](http://www.ansi.okstate.edu/breeds/cattle/angus/index.htm) herd to establish the original Lowline herd. A variation of crosses from low growth rate yearling bulls, high growth rate and random selections were used with these cows to create a divergence in growth rate in the shortest possible time. Since this time, the Lowline herd has remained completely closed, with all replacement bulls and heifers selected from within the line on the basis of low growth rate performance which has led to a smaller animal. Lowline do not carry the Achondroplasia (Dwarfism) gene and therefore there is no risk of genetically generated deformity or abortion.

The Australian Lowline Cattle Association (ALCA) was formed in 1992 after the Trangie Research Centre released the breed to the public. Lowline cattle are now a definite beef breed. They are black in colour, naturally polled and at all stages of their growth are 60% of the size of normal beef breeds which usually makes them the smallest of the beef breeds. The cows make excellent mothers with the capability to provide adequate milk and at maturity will weigh an average of 320kg in good condition whilst mature bulls will weigh around 400kg. They are quite docile and easily managed which make them very popular with the small acre farmer who can run several more Lowlines compared with other larger sized beef breeds. Ease of calving, despite their size, is also a feature of the breed.

An addition to the Black Lowline, Red Lowline cattle came on the scene in 2005 with the birth of the first two red calves to Lowline cattle at the “Vitulus” stud near Mulgowie in Queensland. These have now developed into Redline cattle and have proven to be very popular with breeders, especially in the USA. The Vitulus stud is one of the leading studs in Australia and was adjudged the most successful beef breed exhibitor at the 2011 Brisbane Ekka. This award is presented to the breeder of the breed that has the highest aggregate points for judging on the hoof, hook and show ring. It highlights the overall potential for this breed with their meat and milk quality.

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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 NEW MANUAL. WE WELCOME PRODUCER INPUT AND INTEREST AND WANT TO INVOLVE YOU IN WHAT WE ARE DOING.**

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