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EDITORIAL

The beef cattle industry is currently experiencing some of the best returns they have seen for many years in a number of countries. As is usually the way, there is a reason for this and at present, it would seem that several of the world's largest beef producing countries are experiencing a downturn in cattle numbers and hence a shortage of product that is causing the upward market trend. The beef cattle industry world-wide has historically been quite cyclical so now it is a time for producers to take advantage of these higher returns and catch up with their infrastructure upgrades etc. on their properties and start to take measures to protect themselves against the next price drop that will surely occur again in the future.

In Australia, the lower dollar value on world currency markets has also assisted with export sales of both chilled beef and the live trade. However, the continued drought in some of the main beef producing areas in this country means that those producers who probably need to take advantage of the current better prices have long ago sold most or all of their stock. I guess it is one of the cruel ironies of the business we are in and the vagaries of Mother Nature. It will be a long struggle for many even when the rains do come and they are faced with the mammoth task of restocking again. Let's hope that for the sake of the industry that those producers are given the support they need to restock and get their businesses operating at capacity again and that returns remain good for years to come. Even with the publicity surrounding the higher meat prices to the consumer, in real terms in today's market they are no higher than they have been at times in the past. Unfortunately, the press seem to focus on food price rises much more than they do for other commodities that are not so essential for human existence and this tends to escalate buyer resistance to such products.

WHAT'S (BEEN) HAPPENING

* The 5 day evaluator training course will be held from October the 19th. to the 23rd. at the Nanango Showgrounds. Nanango is about 2 and a half hours North West of Brisbane and we will arrange transport from the airport for any participants who are planning to fly in. At this stage, we are expecting about 10 participants which will be a good number in terms of working around the cattle crush and in the yards generally. There is still room for more participants if any of you would like to join the course. We are planning the course with variety in mind and plenty of opportunity for participants to practice their evaluation skills. As this is the first such course that we have conducted, we are naturally a little apprehensive about how it will go. However, we have had plenty of encouragement and if we get good participation then that will assist. This newsletter may be a little shorter than some in the past because of the time it is taking me to put together the course manual etc. and make arrangements for the course. Each person on the course will receive an operating manual that will contain the points to consider when evaluating each of the main primary traits and the 10 breeding and 8 meat traits. They will each have score sheets with these other points set out to be scored and then averaged out over each main trait.

*We would like to let everyone know that the ultrasound machine is up and working for anyone who is interested in having their cattle bone scanned for bone shape re tenderness. We are waiting for information about when we can get a remote foot control for the unit, but that doesn't prevent us from using it now. It just means we need to set up the machine closer to the head bail than we would ideally like it to be.

*Our annual meeting will be held on Saturday the 10th. of October and if there are any items of interest to pass on I will publish these in the next newsletter.

* 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.

* During the next three months I will be heading into Central Qld. to do some evaluations for breeders in that general area as well as visiting Central New South Wales.

*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.

*We also have breeders interested in purchasing well-muscled Red Poll bulls.

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VARIATIONS AND VARIABLES

One of the things that we are continuing to see a need to be aware of during our evaluating is the variations between cattle over the range of traits that we assess on. In some cases they are very small, whilst in others they are much larger. The main variations can be seen between beef and dairy breeds and between Bos Indicus and Bos Taurus species. I have touched on this briefly in earlier newsletters, but I would like to explain in a little more detail these differences. It is not possible to just look at the traits we have identified in our system and say that they will fit every animal exactly. It has become very obvious to us that we need to keep in mind these variations if we are going to provide a truly accurate assessment for all breeders. The variations that occur should not do so within breeds or generally between species or between the beef group of cattle or dairy cattle i.e. trait characteristics that match one beef breed should match all beef breeds and similarly with dairy breeds and bos indicus and bos taurus species.

Certainly, things like animal size and polled or horned characteristics will vary between breeds, but not the indicators for acceptable trait characteristics.

Let's start by looking at some of the variations in the traits we assess for between the Bos Taurus and Bos Indicus species. These are the two surviving species after the Bos primigenius (Bos Urus) species was declared extinct (aurochs) in the 1600's (1627) though there are breeds that can be traced back to having more than one of the species as parents. Breeds such as the Santa Gertrudis and Droughtmaster (Bos Indicus/Bos Taurus hybrid) and British White Park (Bos Taurus/Bos Urus) are examples of this and just adds a little more complication to being able to develop an overall evaluation system.

1. Butter fat indicators – We have generally found that Bos indicus cattle don't show very much flake in their tails. This has meant that we need to look more closely at things like the ear wax in particular, skin wrinkles and hair softness when considering the ability of a Bos Indicus to produce butterfat. There is no doubt that Bos Indicus cows do produce butterfat even when their a few tail flakes. This is evident in their calf's sappiness.
2. Adrenal whorl – Rarely have we found the adrenal whorl on Bos Indicus cattle to be on or in front of the shoulder. As a general rule, it will be 4 – 6 inches behind the hump. Of course, the hump on most Bos indicus cattle makes it more difficult to see exactly where the whorl is situated.
3. Skin texture – We believe that climatic conditions will cause variations in skin thickness, in particular, and this in turn will affect the degree of elasticity so consideration needs to be given to this factor when evaluating. Bos Indicus cattle will generally have thinner skin than Bos Taurus. Again though, the variations within the species should not vary and that is not to say that some Bos Indicus may have thicker skin than some Bos Taurus. They then need to be graded down when evaluating.
4. Linear measurements – We believe there are possibly some minor variations in some of these measurements as well though we haven't fully or specifically compared measurements to be able to categorically state this. We have measured some Bos Indicus cattle that have measured fairly short in the shoulder width compared to rump width yet have a good heart girth to full top line comparison when one would have expected them to also be lacking in this measurement. What we did notice with these cattle was that they had a good rib spring off the shoulder. The body condition of cattle will also affect their measurements to some degree. As a rule of thumb, the linear measurements we use are for an animal in good score condition, say a score 3 – 4 on the Australian body mass condition scoring system.

Some of the differences to consider between beef and dairy breeds include:

1. Angularity – Usually we are looking for more angularity in dairy breeds between the top line and flank and shoulders and rump. In measurement terms this will equate to a flank girth that is 3 - 5 inches bigger than in beef breeds. We also look for a larger heart girth in beef cattle.
2. Escutcheon – As would be expected, the escutcheon pattern should be generally larger in dairy cattle.
3. Butterfat – The indicators for butterfat are generally more prominent in dairy cattle.

As is usually the way with nature there are a couple of other indicators I would like to mention that do need to be considered with the beef/dairy cattle comparisons.

One is the butterfat indicators that will be more prominent in dairy cattle and then within dairy breeds we have found that Jerseys and Guernseys in particular will have more prominent butterfat indicators compared to, say, Fresians.
Within beef breeds, we have noticed, for example, that the Wagyu breed tends to be smaller in the back end and larger in the front than the usual beef breed. Then there is the example of the Bazadaise breed that is generally slightly longer than the majority of other beef breeds. We have definitely seen this consistently with both of these comparisons when we have been linear measuring.
I am sure that you will know of other variations that could be added to the above so please don't hesitate to let us know so we can add them to the list.

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CATTLE TAILS

We occasionally get some comments and questions about the significance of tail characteristics in cattle. We have made some reference to this topic in our general traits comments so I thought I might add a couple more thoughts for people to muse over here. No doubt there are other indicators that the tail can give us and if you know of more, please feel free to let us know about them.

1. Setting – Where the backbone finishes and the tail starts. If this is not defined and back rather than forward on the body, then it will cause a drop off in production and the development of rounder muscle whilst looking good, doesn't yield as much red meat and can be another indicator of a reduction in fertility. The set of the tail is usually a sign that the pins are quite high and sometimes well above the hooks. This will make calving more difficult because the angle of the calving canal is increased thus making it harder for the calf to manoeuvre along it. A high tail set will also often mean that the tip of the vulva is not sitting flat and this creates difficult in conception and also tends to hold faeces which can lead to infections in some cases. A high tail set can also be an indicator of a weak loin.
2. Thickness – A thick, coarse tail is a good indicator of later maturity and lower fertility potential. A finer, whippy tail can also be an indicator of better meat quality.
3. Length – A long, thin tail that reaches the hocks is ideal. If it doesn't reach the hocks, it can be an indicator in cows of a shorter lactation.
4. Swish – Flakes in the swish of a beast's tail will provide a lead to her ability to produce a high content of butterfat in her milk. The more carotene in the colouring of the skin and the yellower and larger the flakes the better.
5. Hair direction – When the hair on the top 6 – 9 inches of the tail of a cow is lying flat during the last 3 months of pregnancy, the cow will have a heifer calf. When the hair is tending to point straight out, she will have a bull calf.

The other thing to remember is that cows tails will usual be somewhat finer than bulls without the "club" shape of a bull's tail, especially at the top.

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BIODYNAMIC AGRICULTURE

Over recent years there has been a growing interest in the production of organic food with much of the drive for this direction coming from health conscious consumers. There are a number of different ways to manage a cattle property and herd in a way that meets the requirements to be called organic. Despite a little confusion over the different registration bodies that are accredited with overseeing the organic or regenerative agricultural industry, it is now becoming a strong direction for a growing number of producers.

In this newsletter, I would just like to introduce briefly one of the older methods of farming using natural methods and products and the power of nature to sustain itself , grow and improve productivity. Biodynamic farming systems were originally developed by Rudolf Steiner and presented publically in 1924 in a series of lectures. It was developed from methodologies derived from practical application, experience and research based on a range of natural preparations and rigorous observation by Steiner.

Biodynamic farming involves the use of a wide range of techniques including applications called Biodynamic preparations. These are a series of biological materials that powerfully develop soil microbial activity, root growth, humus formation and light metabolism. Other techniques include Biodynamic composting, careful cultivation methods, and the use of a scientifically based moon and zodiac planting chart to enhance production.

Biodynamic farming has been scientifically shown to produce highly friable, fertile soils and healthier plants and animals. With the use of Biodynamic preparations, soils develop much higher humus levels, (absorbing and holding considerable tonnages of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere), allow faster infiltration of water, hold more water than conventional soils and require less frequent irrigation.

The above are just a few of the advantages of introducing Biodynamic methods into a farm program to replace all chemicals. The most commonly used preparation is call B.D. 500. This preparation is derived from placing cow manure in cow's horns and burying for up to 12 months. The resulting preparation bears no semblance to the original material. It is then used stirred with water and spray under low pressure onto the soil as the main soil conditioning preparation for a farm's soil.

The following is some of the equipment needed for mechanical stirring and application of the B.D. preparations:

1. Storage box – a copper holding vessel within a wooden box lined with peat moss.
2. Stirring machine – a stainless steel tank that will comfortably hold a minimum of 60 litres of water with a reversible electric motor and paddle to stir the preparation for an hour. The electric motor requires a reversible switch so that when the preparation reaches the trip paddle on the side of the vessel it will stop and reverse, thus causing the vortex that has just been created to fall back within itself and at the same time drawing air into the mixture.
3. A 60+ litre stainless steel tank for mounting on a tractor, trailer etc. equipped with a low pressure pump and spray nozzles to distribute the preparation in large globules onto the soil. The 60 litres needs to be applied within an hour of stirring, if possible, after 3 p.m. and on a waning full moon. This is when the soil is drawing in energy from the earth's atmosphere.

This equipment can be used to apply most of the B.D. preparations. The B.D. 501 preparation based of silicon is a leaf spray applied in early morning sunlight.

The preparations can also be mixed using a water flow method. There are seven products that can be mixed and applied through a spray. Composting is also another major part of biodynamic farming and most of the preparations used for spraying are also used in the composting process.

Organic farming needs commitment from those using it and an ability to believe in what they are doing to overcome the sceptics and the pressure from the manufacturers of chemical based soil and animal stimulants.

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BREED OF THE QUARTER

CHIANINA

It is believed that the Chianina breed began in the Bronze Age in about 1500 BC, derived from animals from Asia and Africa that were brought into Italy. They are a dual purpose breed, raised both for meat and draught use. They were settled in the area of Val di Chianina in Italy at least 2200 years ago and were predominately used as a draught animal. As farming became more mechanised prior to the second world war, the Chianina lost their role as draught animals and so producers began to select them more for meat production. They began selecting animals with shorter limbs, longer bodies and more heavily muscled rumps and thighs. Since the Second World War, the Chianina has become a world breed, raised almost exclusively for its high quality meat. There is some debate about when the first Chianina herd book was established, but it is generally accepted that a breed standard was established and commissions were set up by the then Italian ministry of agriculture and forestry to identify, mark and register morphologically suitable animals with the standard of the Chianina breed being fixed by ministerial decree in August 1935. The first Chianina semen was brought into Australia from Canada in 1974.

The Chianina is both the tallest and the heaviest breed of cattle. Mature bulls stand up to 1.8 m (5 ft 11 in), and it is not unusual for bulls to exceed 1,600 kg (3,500 lb) in weight. They are characterised by a white or grey coat and a black switch. They have black skin pigmentation. The Chianina are heat tolerant and have a gentle disposition despite their large and intimidating size. They are a trim animal of uniform depth and without excessive dewlap and brisket.

They are a horned breed with short horns that change in colour from black in young animals to white after about 2 years. They are late-maturing, and are therefore suitable for production of yearling and older beef. They have well-defined, heavy muscling, with the shoulders, back and rear being especially well-formed. They generally have small, well-formed udders and teats and are believed to have relatively high levels of butterfat for a beef breed. The Chianina breed is well known for their capacity for lean meat production with meat that is a rich red colour and is free from waste but still retains a marbling of fat among the muscling with a large eye muscle. They are quite adaptable to a variation of environmental and climatic conditions and do well in ‘soft’ or ‘hard’ country and are without par in ‘tough’ country or in bad seasons due to their strong hooves, long legs and general toughness which enables them to walk longer distances than most cattle for forage and water in tougher conditions and bad seasons. They are also known for its high heat tolerance. Their gestation period tends to be longer than in British breeds though.

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I would welcome any feedback from you on any subject that is discussed in this newsletter. I have had some feedback over the time we have been publishing it and it is most appreciated and helpful. Please keep the feedback and comments coming.

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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.