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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the October edition of our quarterly newsletter. My hope is that you are all finding ways of coping with the restrictions that have been put in place in regard to COVID – 19. For some, the disruption has been minimal. However, for many it has meant adopting some real changes, changes that will probably be permanent. We in Australia and also New Zealand can be thankful that the impact on people's health and lives has not been as devastating as it has in many other countries. The very stringent restrictions imposed by governments here has reduced the impact of the virus and whilst the health of people is the number one priority at all times and in all situations, we will all face challenges in other areas of our lives as the threat from this virus subsides.

Generally, the various levels of government here have taken the most conservative and safe way of looking after the public. What we will all be looking for as the threat reduces is a similar approach from them to get the economy back on track. Failure to do so will only prolong recovery and I think this applies to most countries. The fairly obvious approach to this is to invest in future infrastructure such as water storage and energy reliability.

There are many businesses, especially the smaller ones that are really going to struggle as things get back to a sense of normality. Whilst supply of goods and equipment to the farming sector has been affected, most day to day operations on properties have been able to be maintained at a reasonable, though often different level. Businesses involved more directly in service type industries such as hospitality and retail have had a far more direct impact on their lives.

WHAT'S (BEEN) HAPPENING

*Our plans for future travel continue to rest in the hands of what government restrictions remain in place over the next three months. At this stage we are not sure how the COVID-19 situation will affect our planning. We were able to travel to the Northern Territory for the Coodardie Bull Sale in August and make some calls in Central and Nth. Qld. during that trip. However, travelling south is still not viable at this stage at least.

* The annual Coodardie Bull Sale held in August was somewhat disappointing on the day for the O'Brien family with only a relatively small number of fairly local, repeat buyers attending. It is at least partly because of the restrictions placed on travel etc. However, within two weeks of the sale the complete catalogue had been cleared so the end result was very acceptable.

*We are still hoping that we might do a couple of one day field days closer to home in the next couple of months.

* We have applied for a sight at Beef 2021 and are hopeful of being successful. Obviously, the current restrictive environment we are faced with has presented many challenges for the organising committee and we recently received information that they were waiting for another month or so before they finalised the program for next year and won't be advising of successful stand applications until later in November.

* We are still very keen to hold more field days in other 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.

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

BREEDING FROM THE TOP DOWN

I would like to further discuss and elaborate on some of the points that I have made in previous discussions in regard to herd breeding. However, I would like to emphasise that these comments are to be taken more in a generalised context because I am aware that every breeder and every environment has different needs in terms of what set of traits in an animal will perform best in their particular climate. I appreciate that everyone has different ways of selecting what they want in terms of achieving their overall goals in terms of breeding. What I would like to provide here is another option that some of you, at least, may not have considered.

What I am suggesting is that rather than build our herd from the bottom up by culling what we consider to be the worst animals that we focus on the top end or best animals in our herd and breed from these. I realise some of you already do this and what using this method does is automatically force the worst performers out of the herd as we add the replacements to the very top of the herd rather than just as animals that are only better than the ones we are culling rather than being better than any of the other members of the herd.

What I usually do now when I grade a herd and send the breeder the results on our spread sheet is include the overall herd average for the primary traits we grade on as well as individual animal averages. Remember, when we do this on our system the tenderness and hormonal activity traits attract double points in the grading system with beef cattle.

I also identify the animals that I consider to be elite performers. These animals will all score at least 3 on our grading system in all traits and usually at least 2.5 for tenderness and not average more than 4 overall. This may vary slightly with the size of individual herds and its overall current measure of quality. Some of the herds that we have been grading for a number of years will have a higher average for eliteness than new herds as a rule. It also depends on the number of replacements required for each specific herd on an annual basis.

I also want to reinforce the fact that whilst the scores each animal receives on our spreadsheet for their primary traits may appear as singular we are also grading a range of secondary traits that we consider as part of the primary trait evaluation. I have included the score sheets we use at our evaluation courses when we are training people to evaluate using our system at the end of this newsletter so that you get an idea of what I mean.

For example, when we are considering tenderness, we are examining the bone for density, fineness and shape as well as looking at traits like angularity, body shape, leg bone and most of the indicators for butter fat.

The reason we also consider most of the butterfat or milk quality indicators is because we know there is a strong correlation between meat and milk quality and if you would like to see the research we have done to justify this comment then it can be found on our website, classiclivestock.com and at the "research" link. We also believe that meat and milk quality is mainly influenced by genetics,

whereas the other two primary traits we consider when evaluating cows and heifers, that is, hormonal activity and milk quantity, are also influenced by nutrition.

So when you have identified the elite animals in your herd you have a base to start breeding top quality replacement animals from.

Having made that statement, I need to qualify it by saying that where your herd improvement goes from there will depend on the genetic history of each animal. By that I mean that if you select a bull with strong indicators for tenderness, for example, he may not necessarily pass that on to all or even many of his progeny. This will depend on his own genetic ancestry. It may be that tenderness was only partly dominant in one of his parents and grand-parents, great grand-parents etc. and may not be dominant enough to say, be good in all his offspring.

When it comes to actually breeding your replacements that will go in at the top of your herd in terms of quality producers, start with selecting a group of elite cows. Initially this only needs to be a small, but quality group. Then select a bull, if you have one, that is at least as good as your few best cows in scores. If not, then find one from another breeder from a similar environment, if possible, and that should be the last bull you need to buy because the gene pool you have now got in your elite animals will breed your future replacements that are the ones that will perform best in your environment.

When you join your best bull with your elite cows, select the progeny carefully that you are going to use as replacements. Again, this will be greatly influenced by their genetic history. Initially, most of you will have inconsistencies in these early progeny and that is mainly because the gene pool they have been bred from will be larger. As you select more closely from the group of elites you are breeding from, consistency will start to emerge until all the offspring you breed are good enough

and consistent enough to use as replacements.

To achieve this, select a bull to mate with the heifer offspring of this initial mating that will improve the weakest trait of these heifers. From this mating select the best bull and put him back over the initial elite herd. Then from that mating, select the best bull and put him over the first drop of heifers from the initial elite herd. Use the best bulls from each of these groups in future years to go back into your main herd.

Keep evaluating the offspring of your main herd and select the elite performers from there to add to your original elite group. By following this process, you are tightening your gene pool and at the same time automatically improving the overall consistency and balance in your herd.

So why wouldn't you follow the above or similar process. Well, the main argument we get is that it takes too long and costs too much.

Let's have a closer look at this. Okay, so you don't need to necessarily do any extra musters. The assessments and selection process can be done when you have your cattle in the yards for other reasons such as vaccinations, preg. testing etc.

Yes, the elite herd does need to be kept separate during mating, but this might only need to be for the first month of joining. This will also assist in selecting the most fertile and hormonally active cows because they will become pregnant in the first cycle and these are the cows you want in your herd.

Then there is the cost saving of not having to buy in bulls when you have the elite herd to produce better bulls for your environment than you can buy elsewhere. That is, the cost of researching numerous sale catalogues, travelling to a number of sales, the cost of transport for new purchases back to your property and possibly accommodation to name but a few of the associated costs. I also appreciate the importance of sales as a social type outing where you can meet

friends and fellow breeders and network within the industry. This is time out for us from the day to day activities of operating your business, but you can still do this and not have the added pressure of having to select bulls.

BREED OF THE QUARTER

SALERS

The Salers is a breed of cattle which originated in an isolated mountainous area in the southern part of the Massif Central, located in the Auvergne region in France noted for its rugged and harsh terrain with a damp climate and a wide range of temperatures in both summer and winter. The Aubrac breed is also known to have originated in this region as well.

They are thought to be one of the oldest breeds in the world, with prehistoric cave paintings of a similar type of animal being found near Salers and it is believed that they could have been bred in the area for 7 – 10,000 years. Because the country that they were bred in was not suitable for cultivation, they are known for their foraging ability.

They are a large breed, with females weighing between up to 750 kg (1,650 lb). Bulls can weigh up to 1100 kg or just over 2400 lb. Birth weight of Salers calves is usually between 30 and 40kg. They are known to be a very fertile breed with quite short gestation periods.

Their coat is thick and curly, especially in winter, and can vary from black to a deep red and they have long, lyre-shaped, light-coloured horns. The mucous membranes and skin are black, which is an advantage in protecting against sun-damage around udders and other sensitive areas.



There are some strains that are naturally polled. Their temperament is generally quiet and calm. Salers cows mature early, usually having their first calf at two years old.

Their milk is quite popular in some regions, and is very high in protein compared to most other breeds.

Their meat is of a good quality, and they convert feed to weight quite efficiently. Their foraging ability is naturally well-tuned, and they can thrive on most pasture-types.



Only about 10% of the Salers herds are still milked in France today, with the remainder of the herd being used for beef production.

The milk that is produced today is primarily used to make cheeses traditional to the local area.

The Salers have one of the largest, well-shaped pelvic areas of any breed which assists with their calving ease and shorter gestation period.

Because they are one of the oldest and most genetically pure breeds in Europe, added to by the fact that they originated in

a small area without the influence of outside genetics for many years, they are still producing a very consistent, true to type animal that is more predictable and repeatable than most breeds. This does flow through even when they are bred to another breed for hybrid vigour.

Their legs are well adapted to rough terrain, as their black hooves are strong and sturdy which reduces their susceptibility to lameness.

The breed has a long history of traditional herdsman style management. The practice included joining the cows to the bulls for a 45 day period in the spring and then walking them for up to 100 km. into the nearby mountains where they grazed on communal pastures for the summer without the presence of any bulls. The calves were kept shut in a pen and twice a day were tied to the front leg of their mother while she stood untethered and was milked by hand. Some milk was then left for the calf to suckle before the calf was put back in its pen.

WHERE FROM

At the risk of appearing to be somewhat self-indulgent, for which I apologise for now if anyone objects, I thought I would add a little of my background in the industry so that people do know that whilst I am not living on the land now (10 acres doesn't really qualify), I had a long history growing up with cattle. I thought I would just share a couple of things that are not really any use in selecting or managing your herds, but are experiences that I had associated with cattle.

I never knew my paternal grandfather. He passed away about ten years before I was born and a couple of years before the second World War.

Whilst my family never talked much about him, and that was more because it just

wasn't part of their nature to live in the past and it would have probably been 15 – 20 years after he passed away that I would have understood much of what they said about him anyway.

Between the two world wars, he developed a very good Ayreshire herd that he milked along with my father on the family farm. I do remember seeing photos of champion bulls he had bred and of the many show trophies that he won with his cattle.

In the early 1980's, I was involved in silage contracting and was doing some work for some dairy farms about 90 minutes drive from home. One of the families I worked for had one of the, if not the largest, Ayreshire herd in Tasmania at the time. One day during a conversation when I was admiring the herd, two of the brothers who owned the herd and were quite elderly at the time asked if my grandfather was related. I confirmed who he was and they related that when they were teenagers they used to go with their father on the states show circuit and can remember my grandfather quite well as they were strong rivals in the show ring. They told me that my grandfather was one of the best judges of cattle they had or ever would meet so it was very gratifying for me to hear that. I have always had a strong liking for the Ayreshire breed and especially their magnificent horns. Not only are they quite good milk producers they also have very good quality milk that is probably next to Jersey's in terms of butterfat production.

My father sold the dairy herd when I was about 6 -7 years old to take advantage of the wool boom of the 1950's when Australia used to ride on the sheep's back. That was a very shrewd move on his part and added financial stability to the farm. Prior to that he used to make cheese from the Ayreshire cow's milk on-farm.

When he sold the dairy herd, he kept one fairly young Ayreshire X Jersey cow and he used to milk her every morning for milk for the family. He did that for about 4 years and then decided he would like to sleep in on Sunday mornings so he gave me the job of milking the cow on Sunday mornings. Needless to say, that soon became every morning before school. Now that old cow used to give us enough milk for our family of five and then have enough extra to put in a broad basin and set to get plenty of cream off for mum to use in cakes etc. I milked that cow for at least another 6 years on top of the 4+ years that dad milked her. Now that may not seem that unusual except that in those 10 plus years she never got in calf so I'm thinking that a ten year plus lactation wasn't a bad effort especially given that the average productive life of dairy cows today is under 3 lactations.

One of the things that I have learnt during my lifetime, as I'm sure most of you have as well, is that it is filled with coincidences and chance meetings that change the course of your life. Doing things like silage contracting gives you the opportunity to meet many people that otherwise you may not have. Apart from meeting the Ayreshire breeders in Tasmania through our contracting business, I also met another person who I learnt a great deal about cattle off because he engaged us to make silage for him in 1980.

That was Supergene principal, Peter Chilcott. Despite his personality vagaries, there is no doubt in my mind that Peter was absolutely unique in his ability to "read" cattle. It was also through our silage business that I met several of the shareholders in our current company from North-East Victoria.

<p>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</p>

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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