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ACN 092435571

P.O. BOX 1181,
MARYBOROUGH, QLD. 4650.

PHONE: 0741297029/0411201879.

Email: gewyatt@bigpond.com

W: www.classiclivestock.com.au

EDITORIAL

Welcome to our Autumn/spring newsletter.

There have certainly been some changes in a number of areas over the last few months which have affected many of us in a variety of ways. Fortunately, we are starting to return to a little normality in terms of travel in regard to the COVID – 19 virus in Australia. Having said that, our thoughts are with those of you in other parts of the world whose governments have not been as successful in controlling this virus. Let's hope that now we have a vaccine that the situation will improve significantly over the next few months and international travel will be able to start again. No doubt there are some of you who have not seen overseas relatives for a year or more now.

Climatic conditions continue to challenge us in many parts of the world. Here in Australia, parts of the country have just been inundated with the biggest floods for many years after bush fires and drought not much over 12 months ago. Regardless of what we think of climate change, we must always respect Mother Nature and her unpredictability. Just when we think we understand her, she throws us a ball out of left field. She always has and I'm predicting she always will.

Fortunately, recent rains have turned parts of the country that were dry and bare 12 – 18 months ago into green wonderlands and in some cases given local areas their best season for decades.

Another bonus for cattle producers in much of Australia, at least, has been the record or near record prices being paid for stock. Producers needing to restock are competing against processors and this is having the effect of pushing prices higher. So many producers had to de-stock during the drought conditions and are now forced into doing their best to purchase enough reasonable quality breeding stock to at least get together a large enough herd to give them some sort of reasonable return

in a couple of years. It will be a long and painful process for many unfortunately though.

WHAT'S (BEEN) HAPPENING

* We are hoping to be able to get around the country a little more freely soon now that the travel restrictions are easing. It may be the spring before we get to NSW, but we have several evaluations to do over the next 3 - 4 months closer to home here in Qld. We are certainly looking forward to catching up with producers again and are planning to attend more field days in the next few months.

* We are currently getting things together for Beef Week from the 3rd. to the 8th. May at the Rockhampton Showgrounds. We have been allocated site CS17, a 10 x 12 metre site and will be joined there by Albert and Rachel Hancock and some of their Red Polls. We would welcome all those attending to visit us. Early plans include having a static visual display, power point presentations and demonstrations of our evaluation system and linear measuring on some of the Red Polls. We are looking forward to Beef Week being an opportunity to get our business back up and running as it was before the pandemic.

* We are still very keen to hold more field days in other localised areas over the next few months. We will be canvassing interest at Beef Week to get an idea of areas where we could hold one day events, 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 are also open to getting back to holding a full 5 day training course sometime this year. We had close to enough interested producers prior to the pandemic so we are hoping those people are still interested.

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

BREED OF THE QUARTER.

Aberdeen Angus

After looking through the list of breeds I have already covered in this section of the newsletter, I realised that I haven't as yet discussed the Aberdeen Angus so given its International popularity, I thought I had better rectify that so the following is what I have done.

The Aberdeen Angus is a Scottish breed of small beef cattle. Aberdeen Angus cattle have been recorded in Scotland since at least the 16th century in the country's northeast.

Although little is known about the early origin of the cattle that later became known as the Aberdeen-Angus breed, it is thought that the improvement of the original stock found in the area began in the last half of the 18th century.

The original cattle found in northern Scotland were not of uniform colour, and many of the cattle of the early days had varied colour markings or broken colour patterns. Many of the cattle were polled, but a few had horns. The characteristics we

commonly call polled were often referred to in the old Scottish writings by the terms of "humble," "doddies," "humlies," or "homyl."

There are three distinct and well-defined breeds of polled cattle in the United Kingdom. These breeds are the Aberdeen-Angus, the Galloway, and the red polled Norfolk and Suffolk breed that is found in England. Polled cattle apparently existed in Scotland before recorded history because the likeness of such cattle is found in prehistoric carvings in Aberdeen and Angus. Historians state that there were hornless cattle in Siberia centuries earlier. A hornless race of cattle was depicted in Egypt by sculptors and painters of that ancient civilization. Some historians feel that the Aberdeen-Angus breed and the other Scottish breeds sprang from the aboriginal cattle of that country and that the breeds as we find them today are indigenous to the districts in which they are still found.



The Angus cattle are naturally polled and black in colour. They typically mature earlier than other native British breeds such as the Hereford or North Devon.

In 1824, William McCombie of Tillyfour, MP for South Aberdeenshire, began to improve the stock and is regarded today as the father of the breed. The first herd book was created in 1862, and the society was formed in 1879. This is considered late, given that the cattle gained

mainstream acceptance in the middle of the eighteenth century. The cattle became commonplace throughout the British Isles in the middle of the 20th century.

By line breeding and selection for type, the early pioneers established in Angus, Aberdeenshire, Speyside and the Laigh of Moray, the Angus breed. Stock from this area continued to lead the breed well into the 20th century as Aberdeen-Angus cattle became spread throughout Scotland, England and Ireland

Because of their original native environment, the cattle are very hardy and can survive in some of the harshest climates that can produce pasture feed. As such, they are natural foragers in their native environment and respond well in typically harsh conditions where other breeds would lose weight and condition.

With the improvement in agricultural techniques in the latter half of the 18th. Century, it stood to reason that farmers would also be looking to improve the growing and fattening ability of their cattle to fully utilise the improved pasture and forage species being used. This naturally led to the improvement of the Angus breed in terms of meat production, in particular.



Photo courtesy of Glympton Aberdeen angus.

To obtain the improvement in the breed, two strains were used in the formation of what later became known as the Aberdeen-Angus breed of cattle. In the county of Angus, cattle had existed for some time that were known as Angus doddies. In the area of Aberdeenshire, other polled cattle were found and were called Buchan "humlies," Buchan was the principal

agricultural district in Aberdeenshire. These two strains formed the foundation for the Angus breed.

In the north-eastern part of Scotland lie the four counties of Aberdeen, Banff, Kincardine, and Angus. These counties touch the North Sea and all extend inland and have some high or mountainous country. They have been favoured through the ages with a temperate climate and good crops, although the topography of the country is rough. Pastures do well in the area because of well-distributed rainfall. Plenty of grass, plus a nearly ideal temperature for cattle production, has made the area very suitable for some of the greatest improvement that has been made in our purebred breeds of cattle. The county of Angus was early noted for its production of potatoes, grain crops, and feed. This shire contains a fine expanse of highly cultivated land known as Strathmore, which is one of the very fine valleys in that part of Scotland and which has become famous in the history of the Aberdeen-Angus breed. The county of Aberdeen is the most productive agricultural region in Scotland and depends largely upon crops and livestock for income.

Angus cattle are attributed with having a large muscle content and are regarded as medium-sized. The meat is very popular in Japan for its marbling qualities.

Main Characteristics of Angus cattle

1. Colour – Black or red with occasional white markings on the udder.
2. Aberdeen Angus cattle are naturally polled.
3. Withstand a range of weather conditions and are particularly adaptable to harsher cold conditions.

4. They are usually easy to handle and have a quiet nature that allows them to be very adaptable to a range of conditions and situations.
5. They are early maturing and usually have a good carcass yield with nicely marbled meat. Angus are renowned as a carcass breed.
6. They are also used widely in crossbreeding to improve carcass quality and milking ability. They have also been used in the establishment of some of the new breeds that we are now familiar with.
7. They are also used as a genetic dehorner as the polled gene is passed on as a dominant characteristic.
8. Angus cows are also well known for their maternal traits and mothering ability and instinct.

The first record of black cattle imported into Australia was of 8 black cattle that were unloaded at the Hobart Town docks in Tasmania on the 20th January 1824. These cattle were taken to Dennistoun the property of Captain Patrick Wood, near Bothwell.

They were regarded by early writers and then by the Angus Society of Australia as the first cattle to come to Australia of a type similar to those that formed the Angus breed in the following 60 years. The genes of these early cattle that arrived at the Hobart Town docks remain in the Edgell's family Dennistoun Angus herd today, and it remains the oldest property to continuously run Angus cattle in Australia.

In Australia one in four cattle registered are Angus and at bull sales, 30% of cattle sold are Angus.

THE CHINE.

I thought I might bore everyone to tears and revisit a part of our cattle that has a large impact on the confirmation of several

of the important traits that we consider in our evaluation process. We don't look at the chine bone in isolation because we feel its characteristics influence a number of these other traits and we have described several of these in previous newsletters.

The chine height and positioning is a key to the overall balance of an animal. This trait is one of several that doesn't have a precise rating of good at one end of the continuum or bad at the other end. It is important to have balance with other traits such as the front shoulder, angularity and body capacity and it is a trait that will have a slightly different grading in beef breeds when compared to dairy breeds in a similar way that angularity does. Whilst a slightly higher chine is desirable for milk production, it usually means that an animal will have higher maintenance needs, especially when grass fed.

CHARACTERISTICS.

a) A chine bone that has length and is just slightly higher than the shoulder bones will indicate a well-balanced animal. It can be slightly higher in cows than bulls in beef breeds, but not as high as in dairy breeds.

b) A chine bone situated in such a position ensures a long body that gives a high yield of the most profitable forequarter cuts.

c) It also provides the launching place for a strong rib attachment. This ensures a deep, pear shaped spring of ribs that provides plenty of heart room and lung capacity.

d) It is a key to body depth and is reflected when linear measuring and comparing the heart girth to the topknot to pins measurement where for every inch – 2.5 cm greater the distance is around the shoulder, an extra 16 kg of meat will be on that carcass.

e) A well-balanced chine placement will lead to a direct increase in saleable meat yield, high milk production from dams and provide a deep body capacity that gives the animal the ability to increase feed intake and feed conversion efficiency.

- An extremely high chine in bulls can lead to calving problems because of too much neck extension leading to a longer gestation and increased birth weight so there is an optimum height for the chine which will vary slightly between beef and dairy breeds.

- When the chine bone is considerably lower than the shoulders, the animal's body capacity decreases.

THE FUTURE PAST.

There have been a number of times in recent articles etc. that we have talked about looking at the past to assist with

planning a future. That doesn't mean that we are not always looking at ways to improve what we are doing. However, there have been many plans, strategies, processes, call them what you may that have been in existence for many years that are still serving a very worthwhile purpose. In some cases, they have been swamped by the many examples of technology and electronics that we have today, but they are still here filling a role.

There is an old saying – “If it ain't broken, don't fix it.”

Sometimes, I think we forget that. There have certainly been a multitude of developments and inventions that have made agriculture the highly technical business that it is today and without them the industry would not be able to reach many of the goals it is today.

However, some of these developments are only now starting to show us that the cost is going to be greater than was first thought. We are very much in the early stages of seeing the effects of chemicals in agriculture and we have discussed this and the results of current breeding directions previously.

Probably an even greater consideration of these changes to technology and the use of chemically based ingredients to assist in agriculture is the impact it may have on human health. I have discussed some of these impacts in our book “A Vision Tender” What is more concerning is that as we become further committed to this type of change, we don't know what other impacts it will have on our own health. There is already evidence that materials and techniques used two or three generations ago are having an impact on human health. The factor that we can't ignore is what impact current technology will have on our grandchildren and great

grand-children. We cannot unequivocally state that they will only have benefits when it takes many years for some of these practices to show their true colours or impact on the environment and the people in it.

Having said that, I am not advocating any particular political philosophy. Our health and our future are above that. We need to have a greater awareness of what the outcomes of today's actions may have on tomorrow's outcomes.

Whilst we need to keep planning for a sustainable future, there are a number of techniques used over a long period in the past that need to be incorporated into today's world. I refer to things like the breeding programs as well as a much closer look at whole farm systems such as bio-dynamics. Sure, these are obviously a challenge for the way we think in Western civilisation today, but that is not an excuse for disregarding them. After all, they originated with our ancestors so we should not be too proud (or stupid) as to ignore them simply because they were part of a past era. These techniques provided sustainability for many centuries. Industrial/technological agriculture has only been about for less than 100 years and is yet to prove its sustainability.

What I am asking our farm leaders to recognise is that change should not be taken for granted as being better for all. Another factor is that what works on one property may not necessarily work on another, even next door.

All this applies to our cattle industry when we are selecting breeding stock in particular. We have a whole range of tools that have been developed in recent years, in particular EBV's or similar, depending on your country and in some cases breed society. However, the thinking breeder will not be reliant totally on these measurements when selecting his future breeders. There are so many other indicators available that cannot be ignored.

Just one example of this is the debate as to whether or how much scrotum circumference influences a bull's fertility. In some cases, other experts tell us that length is more important than circumference. Confused???? Can't say I blame you. What we do know is that neither the circumference or length matter if the bull doesn't have his epididymis.

Producers of the past knew this without having to measure anything about the scrotum. This information they gained from using their senses, the things that we use to, or at least used to use before we could press a few buttons and all the so-called answers appear magically on the screen in front of us, to take in all that is happening around us and deciphering it with our minds. They did not have the technology to record a huge range of information as we do today. Most of it had to be stored, and remembered, internally or in their minds by these past producers. They gathered their information by observation and comparison. We could do a lot worse than revisit some of these skills of observation today.

As I have stated earlier, we need to keep working with technology to enhance future developments that will enhance our productivity though at the same time keeping Mother Nature as our mentor.

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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