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EDITORIAL

I hope that you have all had a safe and peaceful Christmas and are rested up and looking forward to a successful and rewarding New Year.

The topic I would like to raise here I feel is relevant to today's world and is a sign of the times we live in and the benefits that have been adapted for use in the beef industry. Today's technology enables us to do so many things in terms of evaluating and developing our herds that only a handful of years ago we could only dream about. It has enabled us to keep detailed records about every cow and bull in our herd if we so desire and to do so quickly and in such a way that we can recall those details anytime with the press of a button. It enables us to make decisions about cattle we are considering purchasing without leaving our office. This amounts to major savings in time and money.

Today, many auction houses have available detailed data that provides crucial information for buyers about the livestock they are selling such as EBV's, breed traits and confirmation, intra muscular fat, eye muscle size, weight, health history, temperament etc. When a buyer can't, for whatever reason, make a physical inspection, this information provides a way of making an informed decision about the animals they are considering purchasing.

Much of the time, this detailed data will be enough to ensure that the buyer gets what they want. However, I believe that personal, visual appraisal is still the pinnacle in selection of your ultimate best choice animal. I believe that the beef industry needs to look carefully and be wary of what has happened in the dairy industry where many dairy producers were very quick to adopt AI when it first became popular in the 1960's and has continued to this day where breeders selected only on the figures available on the sires they used. That, I believe is one of the main reasons that dairy cows

today in Australia struggle to produce for more than three lactations on average.

WHAT'S (BEEN) HAPPENING

*We are hoping to hold another 5 day course mid this year providing Albert and I remain healthy. We haven't obtained dates when the yards and Showground Heritage building at Clermont will be available as yet, but will get those as soon as they are made public and from there, work out a time when both are available. We will also be looking to source a variety of cattle again locally to evaluate as part of the course as well as someone to organise the yarding of the cattle at the start and finish of each day. This is one of the things that have become more difficult for Albert and I to manage the last couple of years on top of getting things organised for each day.

*Again, we will need a minimum of 10 people to be able to justify running the course as professionally as we possibly can and we hope to be able to give people plenty of time to plan ahead to attend. We also need to know as early as possible as to who will attend so that we can ensure that there are plenty of course materials available and for catering. We plan to keep the cost the same as last year i.e. \$1600 per person or \$2800 for two members from one family or from one property. This will include all course materials (pens, handouts etc.) morning and afternoon smoko and lunch plus a barbeque taste test on the Thursday evening. Last year was a mad rush for us leading up to the course because it wasn't until the last few days prior to the course that we knew we would have enough attendees to be able to run the it so it would be appreciated if we could avoid a similar situation this year.

*Albert and I are hopeful that our health will continue to be good enough for us to hold more courses in the future. Unfortunately, reality is telling us that we are not quite as young and active as we

once were so we are just taking it a year at a time at present. We are considering future options and may reduce the length of the courses to three or possibly two days. This would probably mean less hands-on practice. I think the thing that makes the running of the courses most challenging for us is whether we are going to get enough participants. This year we only had 6 definite starters 10 days prior to the starting date and two of those were a couple from Jamacia. However, we do appreciate that many of you who would like to attend often aren't in a position to do so or know whether you can until very close to the date. Our dilemma occurs because of the amount of preparation required to run the course and the time it takes to meet the expectations of those attending in terms of logistics and support materials.

* Over the next three months we plan to visit Central NSW to do more evaluations with breeders and a possible one day event.

*We presented at the JAD Speckle Park stud's a "Day in the JAD yards" on Friday the 22nd. November last year and were very much encourage by the response from those present. This day is a great initiative by Amy and Justin Dickens to promote their cattle and also to share what they are doing to improve their herd at a rapid rate.

*If you are interested in having a field day near you or would like to host one, please let myself or Albert Hancock (0417244057/0267334666) 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.

* We are continuing to put together requirements for anyone interested in becoming a registered evaluator and at this stage it will require attendance at one of our past or future long courses and supervised evaluation of a number of cattle (500 – 1000 depending on previous experience) with one of our registered evaluators. Our

evaluators will be operating as private consultants mainly and work together when needed to run courses, field days etc.

*Kookabookra Red Poll Stud has bulls for sale - so if you are interested, please call Rachel on 02 6733 4666 or 0432 581 493.

*We are continuing to have a growing interest in the latest version of our book "A Vision Tender" and this has been most encouraging. The main changes are around the format of the book and all the relative evaluation traits etc. remain the same. We have added a little more information on different thoughts on our system and omitted some of the more previous company orientated parts. The book can be bought on line off our website – classiclivestock.com.au or by emailing us directly.

*We are also happy to promote sales for any breeders, stud or otherwise, who would like to put them in our newsletter, so please let me know the details.

BREED OF THE QUARTER

SOUTH DEVON

The South Devon breed has as long and colourful history as any of our current breeds of cattle. Their origins have been blurred by the passing of time, but it appears that they were derived from the Eastern European aurochs (*Bos primigenius primigenius*), the forebear of today's *Bos taurus* cattle, which roamed the mountainous regions of Europe some 10,000 years or more ago. The breed's ancestors are thought to have migrated westwards into France where they were domesticated some 5,000 years ago and used mainly for draught purposes, which meant they were usually selected primarily for their size.

They became the forebears of the large red cattle of Normandy. Because their appearance does, to some extent, resemble that of the Limousin and Saler breeds of central France, it is possible that these three breeds once shared a common ancestry. However, with the recent finding of the nt821(del11) mutation in the myostatin gene, a mutation which is not found in either Limousins or Salers, there is a strong chance that they have a common ancestry with the dairy breeds of northern Europe.

Following the Norman invasion of Britain in the eleventh century, it is believed that a number of these large red "Normandy" cattle were imported into Britain, with most of them being interbred with the local cattle. In the southwest of the country, however, in the counties of Cornwall and Devon, these red "Normandy" cattle appear to have been kept relatively separate, and were developed as triple-purpose animals, being bred for milk and meat as well as for draught purposes.

In more recent years, another theory that adds to the breeds possible evolution suggests that it arose from cross-breeding between local Devon stock and Channel Islands cattle such as the Alderney. Unlike other British breeds, the South Devon carries the gene for haemoglobin B, which is also present in the Channel Island breeds.

As a breed in its own right, the South Devons originated in the counties of Devon and Cornwall in south-west England with the earliest mentions of it being in the eighteenth century.

The geography and isolation of Devon and Cornwall saw the native red cattle evolve into two physically distinct breeds, the North Devon (known today simply as the Devon) and the South Devon. These two breeds have been recognised as being quite distinct ever since the late 1700s. In fact, old records indicate that a breed society

for "South Hams", as the South Devons were then known, was operative in 1794 and by the 1850s a number of farmers who were breeding South Devons had started to keep their own herd books.

In 1884, the breeders of North Devon cattle formed their own breed society (the Devon Cattle Breeders' Society), so the breeders of South Devon cattle retaliated by forming their own group - the South Devon Herd Book Society (SDHBS), which was inaugurated on 7th October 1890 and incorporated some thirteen months later with an initial membership of 130. The first Herd Book was published in 1891 and described 143 bulls and 972 cows and heifers.

Following its establishment, the SDHBS began a very successful promotion of the breed throughout the southern half of the country, with the result being that by the beginning of the twentieth century, the South Devon had become recognised as the premier triple purpose breed in England.

The South Devon was originally seen as a triple-purpose animal, kept for its milk, for meat and for draught work. With the introduction of mechanical farming after the first World War, their use as draft animals declined and more emphasis was placed on milk and meat production. Then in the 1950's and 60's, the higher producing Friesian breed became more popular in Britain and out produced the South Devons in terms of milk production so the emphasis was directed more towards meat production.

The South Devon is now recognised as a British breed of large beef cattle. Whilst it was a dual-purpose breed, kept both for its milk and for beef, since about 1972 selection has been for beef only.

An interesting point to consider in regard to the South Devon is in the phenotype of its blood. It has been found that it is consistent

with having at some stage had an infusion of *Bos Indicus* blood. It is not known as to when or how this could have occurred, though it is quite possible that they were carried on ships on early sailing expeditions throughout the world and India would have been a popular port of call for many of these vessels seeking trade etc. so it is quite likely the South Devon cattle on board could have been mated with some of the local Zebu cattle. These ships main port of departure was Plymouth, which is in Devon.

Between the 1500 – 1800's, the Royal Navy made extensive use of the local cattle for provisioning purposes. In 1625, it purchased 500 oxen, while historical records indicate that South Devon cattle were bought in large numbers during the Napoleonic wars. Plymouth was also the point of departure for many maritime expeditions (in 1577, Sir Francis Drake sailed from Plymouth to become the first Englishman to circumnavigate the globe). On many occasions, cows were taken on board for these expeditions, and history records that when the Pilgrims embarked from Plymouth aboard the Mayflower in 1620, they took with them cattle from the south of Devon.

In 1623, a ship called the Charity carried a consignment of red cattle (one bull and three heifers) from Devonshire to Edward Winslow, the agent for the Plymouth Colony in North America. It can therefore be argued that South Devons were the first purebred *Bos taurus* breed of cattle in North America. Because of their quiet temperament, South Devons were often considered for these expeditions. They were also well known for their tolerance of varying and often harsh environmental conditions.

Characteristics

The coat of the South Devon is curly and light red in colour and the cattle are both larger and paler than other British breeds of red cattle.

Any white under-body is undesirable, particularly in front of the navel.



Characteristics (cont.)

They may be either horned or polled with the horns being yellowish or white, and downward-curved. They are also known as Orange Elephants, because of their size and position as the largest of the British Native breeds. They are considered very much as a “middle of the road” breed, ideally suited to take advantage of various markets, especially when used in planned crossing programs.

Besides its outstanding growth potential, the South Devon has the ability to put on meat without excess fat. As well as being an excellent terminal sire, the mothering ability and ease of calving and early maturity are all assets of this breed. The South Devon has one unique trait that is very uncommon for most British Breeds and that is that it is very tick resistant.

The South Devon is generally considered as an easy calving breed, easy doing, good tempered, fertile animal that shows a lot of capacity in terms of meat production throughout the body.

The hide on South Devons is usually pliable despite being exceptionally thick and is also very loose and mellow.

The head is broad in appearance, with a broad and uniformly pink nose and muzzle, free from blue blotches and smut (black hairs around lips).

The shoulders should not be prominent, blending neatly into a deep body.

The body should be deep and full in the girth with well sprung ribs, even and extending well back along the spine. They should be deep in the flank, giving a level underline and not an extended gut.

The back should be straight with good width extending from behind the shoulders to the loin.

The hindquarters need to have long, wide rumps and then round off wide and deep to the hocks. The tail should be of a level set and blend neatly into the rump. It should be strong with a good long brush.

The temperament is generally docile.



South Devons outside England:

World War One saw the British Government impose a ban on the export of live animals which lasted for 10 years and this had a major impact on the development of the breed outside of Britain. Despite this, the South Devon breed is now well established on five continents, with active Societies in England, North America, Canada, South Africa, New Zealand, and Australia.

USA - Some were exported to the United States in either 1936 or 1969 and then again in 1974. A breed society was formed in 1972.

AUSTRALIA - South Devons were among the first cattle to be brought to Australia over 200 years ago when a considerable number of cows were imported on sailing ships to provide milk for the early British settlements.

To summarise:- The breed are known for their docile nature and the bulls have gained the name "the Gentle Giants".

Characteristics:-

- Docile temperament giving easy management
- Milky dams with excellent mothering qualities
- Longevity
- Fast growth and early maturity
- Excellent grass conversion ability
- Hardiness and adaptability
- Good modern conformation with length and width that is balanced and comparative

PLANNING TO BREED

I thought I would just expand a little on another topic I have discussed in the past and that is in regard to planning a breeding program to ultimately breed all your own replacement stock. In doing this, I will

generalise because the characteristics of most breeding herds differ to some degree whether it be in size, breed, environment, end market and so on. On top of this is the very important consideration of the individual goals of each breeder in the characteristics they want in their herd and that is something I would not try to influence anyone on. You all know your own stock and the country they live on and what you want your end product to be.

What I am suggesting is a flexible place to start with your breeding program that I feel is practical and with a little vision, is workable and will assist in speeding up the improvement of the characteristics

you desire in your herd. In some cases, it may require a little bit of creativity initially to adapt it to your current program. However, a little initial change should result in a faster and more desirable end outcome.

I believe that the fastest and most efficient way to build quality into your herd is from the top up. In other words, breed your replacements from a pool of your elite animals and as you will see below, it doesn't take long before you are breeding all your replacements and generally, they will be better than the animals they are replacing. It is important that your initial selections are the best that you have and if you only have a small number, then don't be discouraged because you will still end up better off. I'm definitely not advocating the end of the stud breeding industry because that will continue to be a strategic source of improved genetics that breeders can access, especially in the early days of implementing this plan when they will be looking for the best of the best, especially in regard to bulls to use over their elite cows.

Then, as the breeding program advances, breeders may find they need to improve one or more traits in their herd and if they don't have those genetics currently in their own herd, they will need to out-source them and the obvious place will be from within the stud industry.

Genetics will play a major part in the results you achieve. As a rule, the larger the gene pool that one is breeding from, the more challenging it is to produce consistency, balance and repeatability within a herd. Dormant genes can appear in offspring after many generations and for no obvious reason, though it is likely that somewhere in both that dam and the sire's ancestors, that gene was present in a more dominant way.

These mutant genes are present in most breeds and those of you who have been in the breeding industry for many years will probably have experienced a trait that has shown up out of the blue with no

warning sometime during your lifetime in one or more offspring. It is probably more likely to happen in the more popular breeds because generally, they have larger gene pools than lesser-known breeds.

Personally, I had an experience a couple of years ago when I saw a well-conditioned 20 month old bull that had a good confirmation and was very healthy, but was smaller than the 12 month old steers he was running with. Because he had both Shorthorn and Angus bloodlines, one of the reasons for his small size could well have been a throwback to the dwarfism trait that was not uncommon in both the Angus and Shorthorn breeds in the 1960's. I well remember seeing some of these cattle during that time and in some circles, they were actually promoted and the gene bred for.

Sorry, I digress a little from the original topic. Bearing in mind the factors mentioned at the beginning of this section, by selecting a number of elite cows, depending ideally on the size of your herd, then using selective mating will give you a faster way to achieve the desired outcomes for your herd. Selective mating does not need to be an onerous task that many believe it to be and its rewards are plentiful.

You really only need to select a number of your elite cows and I would suggest that if you are using our evaluation system that they are at least a score three or better in the four main traits (six in bulls) we select for (i.e no 3.5 scores or worse).

Whatever the number you select, then look at your bulls and select those that also score 3 or better in the 6 traits that we use to evaluate bulls. If you don't have a suitable bull(s), then it will pay to find one at a sale, ideally that has a reputation for having high quality bulls. Given the standard that you are looking for, i.e. bulls that are 3 or better in all 6 traits, it may take some time to find them.

When you have the required cows and bulls, separate them from your main herd for mating so that you know that your best bulls are

serving your best cows. They only need to be separated from the main herd for 21 – 28 days, i.e. one cow cycle. Then they can all be returned to the main herd. This also has the advantage of ensuring that the cows in the elite herd will all calve first, thus re-enforcing herd fertility.

Once you have separated your elite cows for mating, there are plenty of options in terms of temporary fencing available today that is quick and easy to erect and can be dis-assembled just as easily. If you are not used to more intensive grazing systems, then don't be deterred in trying it. Don't let your fear of a small change prevent you from achieving much greater rewards.

Given that you have, for example, 50 elite cows and you use your best bull over these cows for their first cycle, you can expect to conservatively, on average, get say 40 calves from that first cycle. Assume that there are 20 heifer and 20 bull calves.

The heifers should all be good enough to join the elite herd when they are ready to mate. Having said that, they should all be evaluated just prior to mating to ensure that there are no genetic "throwbacks" that don't score well or have other confirmation trait faults.

As your elite herd grows, you can be more selective and look more intently at the breeding and meat traits we recommend that you consider a part of your selection process.

You can use the same process when selecting your bulls from the elite herd. I would suggest that you use the same bull that you used with your original 50 elite cows before replacing him with one of his sons.

The only thing to watch for is that you don't keep his mother in the original herd that he is going to serve. She can remain in the main herd and return when her son is replaced in two to three years. Providing that the remainder of the bulls from that first drop all score as well or better than their father, then they can be used back in the main herd, therefore quickly improving the quality of your

main herd. By using the remainder of the bulls from your elite cows, you will quickly improve your herd quality. On top of this you know the bloodlines you are breeding from and you don't have to spend valuable time attending sales searching for bulls that are good enough for your herd.

The only matings that I would recommend you avoid in this process is son to mother or father to daughter. I believe that second generation matings are quite acceptable, (e.g. uncle over niece or great niece, grandson over grandmother etc.).

There are a number of breeding charts available that will assist in developing a program to reduce the size of the gene pool in your herd. The key is to only use your very best animals in this process where top traits are re-enforced. Beware of any weak traits and select to remove the animals exhibiting these traits because they will only become more dominant in your herd if you don't.

As I said in the editorial, there is so much data collection technology available now that can be added to your selection process to complement and/or assist what you see when you use the Classic system.

If you really want to take the structure of your breeding herd to the next level, you can use the following method. Again, it depends on your own herd and what you are aiming to produce how or if you use this method and the amount of flexibility you need to apply to it to get the best results for your enterprise. It also depends on your overall cattle operation and whether you can run more than one herd on your property at the one time or at least during the mating season. Flexibility needs to be recognized when a large proportion of a producer's herd falls in the lower grades at the initial evaluation

process, so it may not be practical or financially possible to cull them and replace them all at one time.

Usually, the herd would be graded into three groups and in some cases four.

The Elite Breeding Herd – this is approximately the top 5% of the herd. These are the top cows that will form the basis of the enterprise's long term breeding program and will be joined to the best bulls available to produce a consistent line of high-quality calves to replace their mothers and fathers. If the producer doesn't have a bull that grades as well as, or better than these top 5% cows, then it is important that they find such a bull and purchase him. That then should be the last outside bull that they need to purchase because he should breed his own replacements that are as good as or better than he is.

The Core Breeding Herd – is the next group of cows that could be used to produce to 4 – 6 calves before being culled. The aim is to join them to bulls that grade higher than they do so that at least some of their offspring will also grade higher and can be used as longer-term replacement heifers in the herd or be added to the elite herd.

The Terminal Breeding Herd and Cull group - can be linked together as a cull herd unless there are more than the producer wishes to sell straight away. If that is the case then they can be split into another group to join with a terminal bull for as few seasons as is practically and financially possible for the producer.

The aim is to ultimately have a herd of cows that all fit in the top grade. In practice though, the elite herd should always be improving at a rate that the other herds never quite reach, though they are also improving in quality in their own right.

From there, selection can become more specific where specific traits can be selected for, which leads to even more improvement so that all traits ultimately score a maximum.

I hope you haven't found this section too boring or irrelevant. I only offer it as another option or choice if you are considering ways of making changes to how and what you do with your herd.

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.

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