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EDITORIAL

Welcome to our latest newsletter and I hope everyone is not being affected to greatly by the fall in cattle prices, especially here in Australia. I also hope producers in other countries are not experiencing the same situation as we are here now with prices less than half what they were 2 - 3 years ago. Sheep prices have also followed a similar trend. Whilst it is no consolation, these seasonal and annual price fluctuations have been around for many years so most producer's factor these in to their stocking rates and budgeting. Unfortunately, there always exceptions to the rules and it is these times that we have to be extra vigilant and diligent in our management practices. Predictions are that here in Australia we are heading for an El Nino period which means much dryer weather. If this occurs, it will add to the challenges producers here will face. Low prices and a drought are a bad combination, though as stock numbers decrease during a drought the prices usually improve. However, very few producers are in a position to take advantage of such a situation.

One of the biggest anomalies in the agricultural marketing sector is that producers are inevitably only price takers and rarely price makers and this only adds to the uncertainties of agricultural production as a way to live. I noticed recently of a call by a political group for a freeze on all grocery items because of the current inflation rate and cost of living pressures. This would certainly include all agricultural products. What these people, I call them the concrete creepers (i.e. they never walk on soil) don't realise is that such a move will nearly certainly mean that some producers won't survive and then there will be a shortage and prices will rise even higher. We saw this when the major supermarkets were selling milk for a \$1 a litre. That saw an exodus of dairy farmers and now we have situation where there is a milk shortage here and we are actually importing dairy products at a much higher cost.

WHAT'S (BEEN) HAPPENING

* The five-day course at the Clermont Show and Sale yard facilities we held from Monday the 17th. July until Friday the 21st. July was attended by 10 very committed beef producers. The group worked very well together and Albert and I hope that the learning experience they had will be of assistance to them as they go forward and develop their beef businesses. One of the most gratifying factors about the course from our perspective was that the majority of those attending would have been under 40 years of age and so have many years of working in the industry ahead of them. I would like to thank those who attended for their co-operation and attentiveness during the course. I would also like to thank Albert Hancock for his contribution despite him still being on the recovery road after his accident last year, our wives, Dorothy and Ellen for keeping everyone fed, Rosie Robertson for organising cattle and feed and to Brett Kinnon for the use of his facilities and cattle on the final day of the course.

*Albert and I are hopeful that we are still in good enough health to be able to hold another course next year around July time. We hope that we may be able to promote it at Beef Week 2024 and the Emerald Field Days. 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 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.

*We have now been able to find a suitable venue and date to hold a one-day field day in North-Eastern NSW. The plan is to hold it at Myocum (near Mullumbimby) on Saturday the 21st. of October. We will hold the morning presentation in the Mevlana Hall, 42 Bilin Rd., (off McAuley's Lane) and then head to Johan Kortenhorst's Leela Plantation, 291 McAuleys Lane, Myocum for the afternoon session in the cattle yards there. We are indebted to Johan for making his facilities available to us. Johan was an attendee at our recent Clermont course.

*We are also considering options of further field days in the Gympie and South Burnett areas.

*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.

*Unfortunately, we decided to postpone our trip to the Northern Territory this year because we ran out of days in the week or hours in the day – something like that anyway. As it happened, the day we had planned to go from Mt. Isa to Coodardie, fires had closed the highway on the Barklay Tableland as well as on the Stuart Highway.

*I would also like to report that Albert Hancock, who had a confrontation with his tractor about 10 months ago, has just had what it is hoped will be a final operation and is recovering well. He is hoping to be fit enough to attend the Myocum field day. I was very grateful to him for his contribution at the Clermont course

despite him still being in some discomfort. It certainly made things much easier for me.

* Since the Clermont course, we have been able to visit several of those who attended and spend some time with them looking at their cattle as a follow up after the course. This included a trip to Crookwell in Central NSW as well as one to one of the Luke family properties in Central Qld. near the Galilee Basin on our way home from some evaluating work with a long time client at Aramac.

* We are planning to visit Charters Towers to do some evaluating in early November and will have time to visit other people in Nth. Qld. if anyone would like to see us.

*Justin and Amy Dickens are holding a “Day in the JAD Yards” practical workshop on their property at “Greenvale”, 911 Loombah Rd., Yeoval, NSW on Friday November 17 to view their Speckle Park herd and to hear several speakers, including yours truly, discuss various aspects of cattle production. For further information, contact Amy or Justin on 0427 464 333 or jad@jadspecklepark.com.au

*Coodardie still have some Brahman bulls available for private sale and further information is available on their website – www.coodardie.com.au.

EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

*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.

MAREMMANA

The Maremmana is a breed of cattle reared in the Maremma, a former marshland region in southern Tuscany and northern Lazio in central Italy. It is raised principally in the provinces of Grosseto, Rome and Viterbo.

The origins of the Maremmana breed are quite obscure. Some sources maintain that the Maremmana descends from the *Bos taurus macrocerus*, of which archaeological evidence is preserved in the Etruscan remains of Caere and Vetulonia, with a later admixture of Podolic cattle brought into the Italian peninsula by the Huns and other invaders from the East. Others suggest that the Maremmana is a direct descendant of Asiatic grey cattle, while still others maintain that it descends directly from the aurochs, *Bos primigenius primigenius*.

For centuries, large herds of Maremmana cattle were raised in the malarial marshlands of the Maremma, herded by the Butteri, the mounted herdsmen of the region. Between 1737 and 1859 Tuscany was ruled by the Habsburg Grand-Dukes, who sent Maremmano bulls to their estates in Hungary to improve their Hungarian Grey Cattle. Following the drainage of the marshes in the Battle for Land of the Fascist era, and consequent destruction of the wetland habitat, efforts were made to improve the breed, and in particular to increase its body weight, with considerable success. A herd book for the breed was opened in 1935.

Previously, they were mainly used as a dual-purpose animal and were raised for the production of beef and as a draught breed. The Maremmana is very frugal, survives in difficult environments and is only raised in the wild. The Second World War and the mechanisation of agriculture caused a rapid fall in breed numbers. In 1956, a population of 157,387 head was recorded, but by 2006, the total breed numbers had fallen to 8800. In recent years there has been new recognition of the perfect adaptation of the breed to the

harsh terrain and poor pastures of the Maremma, where the Maremmana is capable of surviving in a semi-feral state throughout the year with only minimal management on land that would otherwise be abandoned.

At the end of 2012 the total number recorded in the herd book for the breed had risen to 9800.

From October to March the animals live in the bush in large plots. After winter, they are transferred to a rotation of pastures, to take advantage of the available spring pastures. At the end of May, the “merca” is carried out. This is when the one-year-old calves are branded and is necessary as they are reared in the wild. During this period, the adult cows and the heifers are “imbrancate” (herded in groups of 25-30, with up to 50 cows per bull) for mating. At the beginning of autumn, the bulls are removed from the herd and the herds then return to life in the scrub.

Characteristics.

Maremmana cattle are a medium sized animal, generally grey in colour with males being darker than females, especially on the front end. Their coat of fur has grey streaks, and their frame is extraordinarily robust. The muzzle, hooves, switch and lower part of the scrotum are black. The skin is black, but some depigmentation at natural openings is tolerated. As in other breeds of Podolic origin, calves are born wheat-coloured and become grey at about three months old.

The horns are robust. In males they are of half-moon shape while in females they are lyre-shaped. They are slate-grey in young animals, and become whitish with black tips in adulthood.

The Maremmana was formerly used as a draught animal, principally in agriculture and forestry, but also for haulage work, for example in the marble quarries of Monte Amiata.

The Maremmana cattle are extraordinarily robust breed of cattle. They are very strong and hardy animals. The cows have a well-shaped udder and are good for supplying an effective quantity of milk for the calves.

They are well known for their longevity of life and can easily reach an age of 15-16 years. They are very good and well known for the production of flavourful and wholesome meat..

They are raised principally for meat today. The breed standard was substantially altered in 1986 to favour productivity over other characteristics. It is one of the two breeds used in the preparation of the *bistecca alla fiorentina*, with the other being the better-known Chianina.



READING YOUR CATTLE “MAP”

One of the things that is sometimes overlooked in today's world of technology and scientific research is the power of observation. I know I have mentioned this before. However, I would like to just take one small page of the cattle "map" and discuss it in this newsletter by combining the internal and external parts of it. Those of you who have been reading our newsletters or have been to one of our courses or field days will be aware of the information that our cattle can give us when we know how to read their "map".

The map page I would like to discuss today is the Adrenal Swirl. I hope to give you an idea of what happens inside the animal to cause the Adrenal Swirl to pass on the messages it does to us. To do this I would like to start by sharing a little about the animal's biology with you. I realise that some or all of this may not be new to you, especially if you have explored the causes of the 'map' yourselves.

It all basically starts with the pituitary gland. The pituitary is located at the base of the brain and is controlled mainly by the **hypothalamus**, a region of the brain that is situated just above it.

The main function of the pituitary gland is to produce and release several hormones that help carry out important bodily functions. It basically is the driving force between one of the main traits that we consider in our evaluation system, i.e. hormonal activity. It is often referred to as the "master gland" because it monitors and regulates a lot of the animal's main bodily functions. It does this by producing a range of hormones that include:

- Growth and sexual/reproductive development and function - fertility.
- Glands (thyroid gland, **adrenal glands**, and gonads)
- Organs (kidneys, uterus, and udders)

The adrenal glands are endocrine organs located in the abdominal cavity directly above the kidneys. Each gland consists of an inner

adrenal medulla encased by the outer adrenal cortex. The endocrine system, which I have mentioned previously when discussing the optimal and most efficient size for an animal, is the engine room of an animal. The adrenal glands secrete different hormones which act as chemical messengers. These hormones travel via the bloodstream and act on various other body tissues. Cortisol is a hormone produced by the two adrenal glands and this is regulated by the **pituitary gland**.

Because the pituitary gland is responsible for the production of a range of other hormones that affect fertility, it stands to reason that in cows it will affect their oestrogen production. So, when this changes, it also changes, often quite subtly, other functions in the body such as the direction of the hair in the animal's coat. What we have observed along with many herdsman before us, is that when the oestrogen levels in a cow increases, it is either because she is in season or she needs to produce extra oestrogen to assist with something such as turning the calf somewhat in the womb. This usually happens around the 4 – 5 month period of gestation. So how does this affect the cows coat hair? What we have observed is that during these levels of higher oestrogen production, it causes a few of the hairs within the adrenal swirl to stand up. This then also tells us that if the hair in the adrenal swirl is laying down, she is either not in calf and not in season at present, or up to about 4 -5 months only into her gestation.

What/where is the adrenal swirl?

It is the place on an animal's spine where the hair starts to go up the neck in one direction and down along the spine is the other direction. This causes a small area where the hair direction is pointing in a circular or all directions. In Bos Taurus cattle, ideally this swirl should be situated between or in front of the shoulders. We have found that in Bos Indicus cattle it is usually, or on average, just

behind the shoulder and ideally starting only 2 -3 inches behind the shoulders. I have seen this swirl on the hump on Braham bulls occasionally and that is good.

What information can this swirl provide to us?

As I have mentioned, it indicates an increase in oestrogen production by cows and this happens when they are in season or 4 – 5 months and onwards in calf. It is also an overall indicator of the animal's hormonal activity as well as other things such as their ability to produce butterfat, meat quality and fertility. Next time you are having your herd pregnancy tested, just take notice of where the adrenal swirl is located. I think there is a good chance that the cows with their swirl further back will be the ones not in calf or late calvers.

This heifer shown below actually has two swirls. One on her neck and one mid-way down her spine. We go by the front one and usually it won't be any further forward than shown here.



This Braham bull has his swirl 1 – 2 inches up his hump which is

not that common and good for a Bos Indicus breed, He would be a good bull to use to increase herd fertility, in particular, if his other traits measured up.



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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