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 **EDITORIAL.**

Welcome to our autumn (spring in the northern hemisphere) newsletter. Summer rainfall in Eastern Australia for the second year has caused some large flood losses and our thoughts are with those who have suffered. Some problems with my hip has slowed me a little over recent weeks but an operation in February has hopefully rectified that and I am looking forward to some busy times ahead, especially at Beef Week in Rockhampton in early May. We are very interested to see what sort of response we get from the cattle producers who attend. Whilst we have held a number of field days and presentations with various groups, breed societies etc, over the last couple of years, this will be the first time we have promoted our business at a large public event.

I have added some information about linear measuring in this newsletter for anyone who is interested. It is a fine line between qualitative and quantitative evaluation when selecting cattle and we need to use whatever tools available to us if we want to get the most comprehensive result. The challenge is in getting the balance right and that is something we are still very much working on. Whilst much of our system is subjective, we believe that linear measuring adds another dimension to the objective side of evaluation.

I have also discussed a couple of other topical subjects I mentioned in the last newsletter including the price we pay for our food, which has been an issue for many years, whilst the other one, carbon levels in the atmosphere, has received a lot of publicity in recent years. I must apologise because this has added a couple of extra pages to this newsletter and I hope you don’t find it too uninteresting.

Again, I reinforce the invitation to you to please feel free to contact us at any time in regard to anything to do with your cattle business. We don’t have the answers but we may be able to offer you some more choices or different ways to grow your business.

**WHAT’S HAPPENING**

**\***I have finally finished compiling data and summarising the results from the fat trials we conducted last year. The full trial is now available for viewing on our website, [www.classiclivestock.com](http://www.classiclivestock.com) under the research link. There may be other conclusions that you can draw from the trial that may be of interest to you personally. The trial was carried out to see what, if any, correlation there was between the CLMS evaluation system and omega 3 fats. In other words, if an animal graded well, would it also be high in omega 3 fat. The result is somewhat inconclusive, even though over 80% of the cattle graded as tender were higher in omega 3. What is fairly obvious is that what the cattle are fed has a significant influence on the omega 3 levels and even a quite tough animal, if fed the right type of feed can be high in omega 3. From our perspective, if the meat is too tough to eat then the fat quality is really not the main issue. What we would suggest is that it makes good sense to feed cattle well that meet the criteria for tenderness. The trial also shows that the grass fed cattle are more likely to be high in omega 3 than grain fed cattle. There is little doubt that if omega 3 supplements were added to the grain ration then that could considerably improve the level of omega 3 in the meat in those cattle. We hope that those of you who are interested in this area will find something of interest in this trial

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**\*** As I mentioned in our last newsletter, our company have booked a site at Beef Week 2012 from May 6th. – 12th. 2012 inclusive on site number 46 in the Walter Pearce Pavilion. This is just to the left of the main entrance as you enter the showgrounds at Rockhampton. We have arranged to have cattle to view during the week so that if anyone who is interested would like to see the practical application of the system we will be able to show them at the event. Our static display will consist of a power point presentation outlining some of the features of the system.

At this stage we hope to have at least a couple of our directors from Victoria on site for at least part of the week along with a couple of our Qld directors.

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**\*** Again, I would like to remind you about the Coodardie Brahman Stud sale which will be held at the Mataranka showgrounds on Wednesday, May the 16th. The sale will commence at 4:00 p.m. after an introduction to the CLMS system by yours truly in the morning and plenty of time to view the bulls and heifers on offer. This is an ideal opportunity for breeders to introduce some of the unique Coodardie meat quality genetics into their herd. The Coodardie herd has been virtually a closed herd for over 35 years with the emphasis on selection being for meat tenderness. At the grading of the last draft of Coodardie weaners, 90% graded as tender on the CLMS system. This is the highest percentage we have ever graded in any herd in Australia. The sale catalogue will be available about a month prior to the sale. There will be refreshments available after the sale.

Rest assured that despite the long trip, the Coodardie hospitality more than makes up for it.

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**\***We are planning to do some more trials around the relationship between high quality meat and high quality, a2 milk in the last half of this year, including the use of ultrasound equipment. We are looking at evaluating cattle for milk quality and quantity as well as meat quality to expand on our previous work. If any of our readers are interested in being involved, please contact me.

**WHAT NOW AND THEN**

An issue that never seems to go away is the debate about the price of the goods that we buy on a daily basis and how the prices always increase and rarely decrease. This seems to apply to virtually all items. Certainly, the one that concerns, and is most relevant to, primary producers is the price of food at the retail level. I may be imagining this, but it seems that whenever there is an increase in price with a food item, it immediately grabs the attention of the media much more than many other goods when they have a price increase. We are told how it is making that product(s) unaffordable for the average family despite the return to the producer not changing. There is a huge outburst of sentiment and the politicians and regulatory bodies make a lot of noise about public inquiries, investigations, etc. at the time and within a couple of weeks all that is forgotten and consumers continue to suffer the cost increase and producers struggle even more to make ends meet in their business.

The one who really suffers is the primary producer at the bottom end of the chain who invariable gets the blame for the price increase, but rarely sees any financial benefit in his/her bottom line when the dust settles because the price increase is taken up by the members of the marketing chain. The producer still has to absorb their input price increases and still try to survive.

There are a couple of somewhat controversial points I would like to make on this subject.

Firstly, it really is a myth about how much we pay for food. We have become a technological, materialistic society that places a much higher value on things like cars, televisions, computers, washing machines etc, none of which are indispensable in the plight for human survival. Yet the outcry when these items increase in price is rarely heard compared to the one thing as humans that we cannot survive without and that is food (including water). I would say that if we used 70 – 80% of our income on food, the one necessity for survival, it would not be too much. Yet we complain when it reaches 30%. What price life. Our values have surely changed over the last 70 years and our affluence has increased significantly so to complain when the one requirement for life might cost a little bit more is really a questionable reflection on our society. Since 1960, the average full time wage has increased 27 times whilst the cost of food has only increased by 20 times. Things like housing, healthcare, education, phones, games, personal care etc. have all increased by more than 40 times.

Secondly, primary producers are their own worst enemy. Collectively, they are a large group, but unfortunately many of the attributes that make primary production attractive to people such as being your own boss and being able to do your own thing, being independent, being creative etc. are also things that have historically made it impossible for the primary producers of any country to form a united organisation that could fight for a fair return for the products they produce. Of course the retail buyers are well aware of the lack of unity amongst primary producers and play one off against the other. We also have the bank managers in the background telling their primary producer clients that if they don’t sell now or take the price on offer then there will be negative financial retributions. This leaves the producer between a rock and a hard place. There is a huge gap in the type of people who make up the primary producer. At one end of scale are the entrepreneurial types who have established their own markets and probably do the whole thing through growing, packaging, processing (sometimes) distributing and retailing. This takes capital and many other would be entrepreneurs would like to do this but simply can’t afford to.

At the other end of the scale are those producers who just take whatever the market offers year in and year out. They are the price takers and the followers, the ones the large retailers rely on as a rule for their cheaper product. Usually they struggle with basic maintenance costs and just keeping the farm productive.

The large, dominant retailers also have the buying power when it comes to negotiating deals for everything from leases on the properties they use to electricity, advertising, transport etc. that the average primary producer as an individual doesn’t have. Again if primary producers could only realise that if they banded together they would have similar buying power. However, the farmer being the person he is, rarely is able to work in a cooperative or buying group situation. I was involved in such a group for a while and we were seeing very good benefits from buying goods such as fuel, fertiliser, tyres, sprays and several other commodities in bulk. However, the system fell down when unsuccessful suppliers of some of the goods approached individuals in the group and offered them private deals that they just couldn’t afford to refuse to try and win back the business they had lost to the co-op. In the end, the group was forced to disband because too many of the members started taking these outside offers. If the group had been able to stay together, they would have surely seen more benefits in the longer term as suppliers saw that the group was not going to be divided by individual offers. I also know that the group members who started taking the offers from outside the group’s designated suppliers were virtually forced to do so because of their financial situation.

Farming organisations really need to unite and introduce much more factual information through the popular media to the public on a larger scale highlighting the true cost of food production and who gets what share of each commodity.

I know this is an old topic and many well-meaning people have tried to change things. However, it will remain as it is until the 80 – 90% of silent primary producers start to realise that they will ultimately not survive without being involved actively in change.

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**LINEAR MEASURING.**

This is a method of evaluating the confirmation of cattle that we have been encouraging producers to consider as a breeding selection tool for a number of years. The response until last year’s visit by Gearld Fry and his demonstration of this method of evaluation at the Nanango Field Day last August was fairly limited. Since that visit a number of very astute breeders have become interested and started to measure their cattle. CLMS has incorporated linear measurement into its evaluation system and added it to our book “The Vision Tender” where details of the comparative measurements are explained.

Linear Measurement was developed originally by the South African animal scientist, Jan Bonsma, from the late 1930’s onwards. He used it to select animals for a breeding program with the German Under-Secretary for Agriculture, Messerschmidt, after the Second World War. All the cattle in this program were selected using this and other selection criteria for quality meat production and were only mated using AI. This ensured a very stringent selection process and has resulted in gene pool of high quality cattle that were exported all over the world to improve herds in the 1950’ and 60’s. (As a sideline, I think the best steak I have ever tasted was in Germany in the early 1980’s).

In 1963, Bonsma introduced the linear measuring system to the Montana State University where Dr. Burt Winchester incorporated it into his research and the result was the formulation of an evaluation system that comprised of body measurement comparisons and ratios that were geared to producing the most efficient animal with high quality meat.

Linear measurements were developed to provide a tool for producers to be able to objectively measure the physical attributes of their animals and compare them against a set of the most desirable figures of the “perfect” animal.

It compares specific body parts of the animal and allows the breeder to recognise cattle that are the highest producers, most fertile and require the lowest amount of maintenance. Linear measuring is designed to provide a selection tool on which to recognise the most desirable cattle by way of body form and function and to use as the foundation on which to build a future herd gene pool.

There is not enough room in this newsletter to go into all the measurements considered in this system of selection. However, I will highlight a couple that are very important. One is the length of the animal i.e. from the top knot to the pin bones. The neck should be a third of the total overall length (can be up to 2 inches less in bulls). The body length is the other two thirds, i.e. from the centre of the shoulders to the rear of the pin bones. The rump length is from the pins to the front of the hooks and should not be less than 40% of the two thirds of the top line in bulls.

Another very important measurement is the heart girth circumference. The heart girth is an indicator of the capacity of the “engine room” of the animal. The larger the capacity the more efficiently the heart, lungs and feed intake system works. The closer the heart girth measurement is to the overall length of the animal the better. Some research in the USA suggests that for every inch the heart girth is longer than the overall top line, the animal will produce about an extra 16 kg. of meat.

The flank circumference should be at least 0 – 2 inches greater than the heart girth and is an indicator of fertility and general maternal traits. A larger flank indicates more meat on the rump.

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**HOW GREEN ($) WILL IT BE.**

One of the issues that are facing primary producers, as well as the general population, around the world is that of carbon levels in the atmosphere. It is a topic that has become the centre of scientific and media comment over the last few years.

I am very hesitant about commenting much on a subject that I know little about although I hope to learn more now it is actually becoming a reality in our world. If many of you are like me, you are having difficulty sorting the wheat from the chaff. There has been so much conflicting information publicised since this issue hit the headlines that it is nearly a full time job just keeping abreast with the whole situation and its likely impact on our agricultural enterprises.

Legislation has recently been passed in Australia that will mean that primary producers will be able to measure the amount of carbon in their soil and be encouraged to use on farm practices that will increase the level of carbon in their soil and be paid to do so. We do know that the Government have programs developed that will measure the amount of carbon that is stored on farm and the changes that may occur to these levels through the way the plants and soil on properties are managed.

There has been a lot of discussion about how and what is the best way to store carbon in agricultural soils. What it will mean is that many farming practices will need to change to:-

1. Comply with Government legislation on the subject.
2. Provide a small but steady income stream for primary producers.

As is so often the case, the producers who are first to accept changes in their management strategies to take advantage of these new regulations will be the ones to probably benefit most, although there are opportunities for all primary producers to improve their enterprise productivity and income.

There has been a lot of public comment about the role of agriculture in contributing to the carbon levels in the atmosphere, some of which is acceptable and others which are misleading.

I would like to concentrate more in the rest of this article on beef cattle because that is the topic that most of you are interested in.

I will apologise now for rehashing some of my previous writings about grazing management because they are taking on an even greater significance now with the whole carbon issue.

Livestock, and cattle in particular, have carried the brunt of considerable public criticism for being significant carbon polluters. Government resources have been invested over the past few years to actually measure the amount of carbon, in the form of methane, individual cattle emit into the atmosphere. This was even before a lot of thought had actually gone into what the carbon cycle actually is. Or it may be that publicity was given to this area by vested interests, who would benefit from more negative publicity for the cattle industry because I am sure that conscientious scientists understand the way carbon is emitted into the atmosphere and how the various sources of carbon interact and cycle through the atmosphere in different ways.

Carbon emitted through the burning of coal (and petroleum) has a much different and more significant impact on the atmosphere to that emitted by farm animals. Carbon emitted into the atmosphere through the coal burning processes, is to all intents and purposes, new carbon. In other words, it is extracted from beneath the surface of the earth where it was in a sealed situation in regards to the earth’s atmosphere and stored in this state. Certainly, there are small emissions of carbon into the air where coal seams are on the earth’s surface, though they are diminishing rapidly now as they are usually the easiest to be mined.

However, when it is in its natural state beneath the earth’s surface it is not affecting the carbon levels in the atmosphere. When it is mined and then burnt it emits carbon in a linear direction into the atmosphere.

On the other hand, carbon emitted by animals is not new carbon. It is part of a natural cycle. This carbon starts in the atmosphere as CO2 and is absorbed by plants through the process of photosynthesis. From there the plants are eaten by animals as food and necessary for their survival process. They in turn exhale CO2 and methane which returns to the atmosphere, is absorbed and then repeats the cycle through plant absorption etc. so in fact the carbon quantity in this cycle does not change.

In agriculture, things like the emissions from motorised farm machinery, exposure of bare soil to the atmosphere and the use of chemical fertilisers, weedicides and pesticides are some of the main contributors to the amount of carbon in the atmosphere that is not in a form that can be part of the natural cycle. Chemical fertilisers, for example, react with soil elements that cause the release of stored carbon in a similar linear action that the coal system has. That tells us that if we can find other ways to improve the health of our soil, then less carbon will be lost.

How can we, as beef producers, improve our soil health and productivity without losing carbon and, in fact, actually benefit greatly by reversing the trend and storing carbon in the soil?

Over the last 40+ years we have had people such as Allan Savoury from South Africa advocating a change in the way we manage the grazing practices of our beef herds. These people advocated these changed practices well before carbon emissions became publicised in the popular media. However, the holistic approaches to grazing management that these people advocated were such that they could not be anything other than beneficial in terms of carbon storage.

Fortunately, after many years of hard work by people such as Allan Savoury promoting the benefits of changing grazing management practices, more graziers and farmers are now adapting these practices in their enterprises. The beauty of these practices are that they can be adapted and modified to suit any grazing situation with a little bit of thought and creativity. In fact, it can be quite exciting replanning and developing your properties when you know the benefits are going to outweigh the inputs quite considerably.

Sure it can be challenging, but challenges are stimulating and motivating and add extra dimensions to our skills and learning opportunities.

The basis of these grazing management strategies revolves around running a large number of stock on a small area for a short time. This is in contradiction to the accepted practice of running a small number of stock on a large area for a long time or until all the available feed was eaten.

I have discussed this system in detail in our book “A Vision Tender” so will only touch briefly on it here. The southern temperate states of Australia were the first places where this practice was adopted here. In those areas the farms are mainly less than 1000 acres in size and are farmed intensively, usually running dairy cattle and to a lesser extent beef cattle and sheep. In more recent years, the system has been adapted and used increasingly on the larger cattle properties in northern Australia. There are certainly different challenges in these areas because of the size of the properties. However, the only real limiting factor as to why they can’t be used anywhere is usually the ability of the property manager to be able to accept change, challenges and be creative. Sure, the amount of fencing needed and the establishment of watering points will be different to those on smaller areas, but it is all relative to the economies of scale.

We first introduced this type of grazing on our former property in Tasmania in the early to mid-1980’s and within 12 months had increased our beef (cow/calf) herd by 25% and the amount of silage stored by 20%. We did actually increase our herd more over the next couple of years but cut back to the 25% increase ultimately for ease of management with our other enterprises. Since that time, I have met and spoken with many graziers who have had similar or better results when they have started this more intensive grazing management system. This includes a number of large area graziers who have adopted the cell grazing method of grazing management, which is similar to the practices in the southern states, but usually without the fodder conservation component of the system. This is usually because they are grazing rangeland that is not arable and therefore can’t be used to store surplus grass as conserved fodder on.

This system of grazing encourages plant growth and therefore the throughput of carbon in the cycle. By grazing for a short time at regular intervals, it encourages the plant to grow faster and more often and this produces a pump like affect with the plant growth and so extra carbon that comes through the plant at the time is stored via the plants roots in the soil.

I would like to conclude this article by highlighting the way most of our grazing species grow. This is an area that possibly isn’t as well promoted or understood as the need to actually graze smaller areas for a shorter time is with larger herds. I have read of several case studies where this system has been introduced and the rotations can mean that cattle are left on the one area for 2 – 3 weeks or even longer. Now I appreciate that there are a range of logistical reasons on individual properties where this may not be able to be avoided, particularly on very large properties where it takes several years to get the system fully introduced and this is not a criticism of these instances. The most important thing is that you are making changes and that they have been justified on both environmental and economic grounds.

What I do want to highlight though, is the growing cycle of the actual plants. Now I also appreciate that different species and varieties of plants will respond slightly differently in how they produce their leaves and new growth.

With temperate climate grasses, when they start to produce their fourth leave on their stool, as a rule, the bottom leave will start to wither and die. You can check this yourselves on most temperate climate grasses. This is the case regardless of the time of year.

It just means that in the growing season the leaves will be considerably larger than they will be in the colder or dryer times of the year. What this is telling us is that at this stage, i.e. when the fourth leave starts to appear, then it is time to graze that area. Once the bottom leaf starts to die, it’s only value will be as humus.

So this gives the most important indication of when a pasture needs to be grazed. I am sure that tropical grasses have a similar growing cycle and it’s a matter of studying them to find out when they have the most amount of edible green matter and base your grazing program on this factor.

The other very important point to bear in mind is the growth rate of the plants you are grazing. During the growing season in temperate climates, the plant leaves will grow enough in three days to be long enough for cattle to graze again. In the ideal situation, that is what we need to avoid. Usually the cattle (or sheep) will tend to go back to the most palatable species after the third day and nip off these new shoots. Now what this means is that firstly, the more palatable species are kept short while some of the less palatable species and particularly weeds, are let to grow and seed rampantly, and secondly, the leave area of these plants never reaches enough to be able to fully utilise the photosynthesis process and thus reduces the nutrient flow to the plants roots and carbon flow into the soil. Ultimately, this means that these desirable species become smaller and weaker and are eventually replaced by the less palatable and weed species, resulting in a lowering of carrying capacity and therefore productivity.

This is the reason why when planning an intensive grazing system to improve the carbon storage potential of your soil, that you bear in mind that the period on each grazing area is not too long and ideally in sequence with the growing cycle of the plants on your rangeland.

Ideally, there should be around 1400 kg. of dry per hectare of plant matter left on the area when you remove the stock. This ensures that there is enough leaf area left to enable immediate resumption of the photosynthesis process at an optimum or near optimum level. If you are grazing on an area where fodder can be conserved, and stock are leaving more than 3500 kg D.M. per hectare after the three day grazing period, then some of the next areas that would have similar amounts of grass left after grazing should be used for fodder conservation. Alternatively, the excess plant material could be mulched back into the soil.

What appears to be the likely outcome around the whole carbon debate and ultimately the implementation of the most appropriate practices to ensure that carbon levels are reduced in the atmosphere to a manageable level and stored safely in the soil, is that the farming community is going to play a pivotal role. Farmers and graziers need to be planning now to manage their properties in a way that will be most beneficial to the environment as well as their financial future.

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.**

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