



## Feedlot challenge

Goondiwindi feedlot faces a supply hurdle in throughput expansion plans.

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# LIVESTOCK

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# Technology pays at Echuca

## 'Abadean' boosts beef production

By BRONWYN FARR



SWITCHING focus from dairying and a successful Angus seed-stock operation to an intensive hybrid breeding and feeding to kill weights set-up has meant combining tradition and technology for Victorian farmer, Dean Mitchell.

Mr Mitchell and his wife, Kelly, are enjoying achieving small milestones in a five-year plan on their 600-hectare property, "Abadean", just west of Echuca, where they run 250 purebred Angus cows and use Circle Eight hybrid bulls.

Mr Mitchell described his farm as "flood irrigation with a bit of dry country".

His brother, Corey, has about 400 dairy cattle at a nearby farm and the pair work together on tasks such as haymaking.

However, to ensure the greatest gains from a relatively small property, Mr Mitchell had taken a micro-management approach, in what he said was the worst drought anybody had seen in 100 years.

This approach utilises technology and rigorous data collection from birth to death on 200 calves sold each year.

"The big positive about using technology is this is the driest this country has ever been," Mr Mitchell said.

"Blokes around here that are 100 years old have never seen it this dry, and the positive is that we have come out the other side and we have learned so much.

"We have learned to grow a fair bit of feed off bugger-all water, and that's the biggest positive from technology on the farm."

His semi-retired father, Noel, has mastered a customised computer program which records data from the moment the calves are born, matching them with their dams and sires and storing information on growth



## Data recording driving five-year plan

A PLAN to sell direct to the abattoir will bring stability to marketing cattle for Echuca beef producer, Dean Mitchell, Victoria.

And with the family's data recording, Mr Mitchell (pictured with wife, Kelly, and daughter, Keira) has an accurate picture of where they are heading "two years down a five-year plan" for the farm.

"The dry weather put us back a bit, but we hope within five years to be selling direct (to the butchers) and achieving really good weight gains," he said.

To give the calves a kick along, creep feeding is used from October when the calves are two to three months old.

He also uses a Gallagher weighing system, which has its

own program to record data and transfer it to his computer.

Mr Mitchell said Elders agents, Matt O'Connor and Tony Pogue, based at Echuca, had helped him with the program, which included their artificial breeding too.

"We have been a family farm for 40 years and hopefully we can pass this on to the next generation," he said.

rates and weights with feed programs.

Collecting "birth to death" data allows Mr Mitchell to finetune to achieve the greatest gains and work out the optimum time to sell.

"Basically we AI (artificially inseminate) the top 100 cows and the other 150 go to the hybrid bulls," he said.

Thanks to his father's data recording, they know when the dam was joined, the bull it was joined to, and when the calves are sold, each one is scanned and weighed.

This way, when they are killed at Kyneton, Vic, they can match body to body with no uncertainty and know the dressing percentages, which have come back as high as 58 per cent.

"After two or three years we can tell if that cow is not good enough – we are averaging \$800 per calf, and if in the next couple of years it is less than average we cull those cows," he said.

"All our calves are spring calves – around the south the best market is in June, July and August."

Mr Mitchell also maintained early weaning was easier on his cows.

He aims for 400- to 450-kilogram butcher weight animals and they are sent directly to abattoirs in Melbourne or Kyneton, although he would like to directly supply local butchers in the future.

The calves are weaned at about 200kg and put onto lucerne if it is

available, and fed a 50:50 ration of grain – mainly crushed barley with supplements – and hay.

This is gradually increased to 80:20 grain to hay as they became accustomed to the feed.

"We can't do too many (for) local butchers unless we buy more cattle and the biggest problem is feeder cattle are too dear to be making a profit when you are competing with big guys with a lot of grass, making their own hay – it costs them less to finish a steer," he said.

"But we are hoping we can directly supply someone close if we can get our name out there and build a reputation for quality."

## Making News

**RTA versus wool:** Proposals by the Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) to fine truck drivers transporting wool bales more than 2.5 metres wide have been shelved.

Fines of \$800 were due to be introduced on November 1 for any truck caught carrying bales in excess of the width stated in RTA rules.

Regulations – known as the *Road Transport (Mass Loading and Access) Regulation 2005* – were introduced by the RTA and stated the maximum width of a vehicle, including its load, could not exceed 2.5m, despite wool being transported on trucks at 2.6m or 2.7m width for more than a century.

However, the RTA has backed down after Minister for Roads, David Borger, met with rural-based independent MPs.

**ALFA applauds decision:** The Australian Lot Feeders' Association (ALFA) has congratulated the Queensland Government for taking a "common sense approach" in suspending the proposed five per cent mandate of ethanol content in regular unleaded petrol.

ALFA president, Jim Cudmore, said the costs associated with higher food and fuel prices from the mandate were always going to outweigh its purported benefits.

"With the majority of ethanol for the mandate to be derived from grain, we have always been concerned that during low grain production years the artificial and inflexible demand created by the Government mandate would inflate grain and hence food prices," he said.

"Notably, grain is not only the single largest cost of production for bread, but also beef, dairy, pork, chicken and eggs.

"These sectors are not happy to compete against an industry which receives a competitive Government advantage."

## Young achiever announced:

A young lady who has played a vital role in the Australian live export industry's success in rekindling its lucrative dairy heifer trade with China was announced as the 2010 Landmark Young Live Export Achiever last week.

Sophie Wang is the managing director of Landmark Global Exports, one of Australia's major livestock exporters, specialising in the export of dairy and beef cattle to China, South East Asia, the Middle East, Mexico and Russia.

The live cattle export industry has chosen a Young Achiever award recipient each year since 2000, encouraging young people to pursue a career path within the sector.



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