



Livestock

Angus hybrids span gap

Combining evenness and performance



By NIKKI ALLEN

ANGUS hybrid bulls may be the answer to bridging the gap between cross-bred performance and the evenness provided by straight-bred cattle.

Commercial cattle producers have long been fans of crossing one breed over another to enhance growth and performance.

On the other hand a pure-bred line of cattle that has "peas-in-a-pod" appeal is attractive enough to command big bucks in the market.

One cattleman who initially earned his stripes in breeding and preparing show cattle has decided to flex his commercial muscle.

Jeremy Cooper, Circle Eight, Tarcutta has combined knowledge of the stud industry and its associated performance recording with some thrifty-commercial nous.

The challenge was to breed bulls that boasted money-making commercial performance combined with plenty of good old fashioned eye appeal.

Mr Cooper has painstakingly crunched the figures and believes his hybrid bulls have a bright future.

His six-month-old Angus hybrid bulls – that also contain Black Simmental genetics – could easily be mistaken for Angus.

"We want them to look like an Angus, we want them to be a little bit thicker and longer and a little taller," he said.

"The cattle are polled and they are black, and registered with the Angus Society database," he said.

"We want to maintain the marbling content, increase the yield and keep the birthweights moderate," he said.

The only visual differences in the six-month old hybrids and their straight Angus counterparts was a lift in frame size and the associated extra muscle.

Hybrid vigour added to the addi-



tional muscle provided by the Simmental infusion.

Mr Cooper's interest in hybrid cattle was sparked after he attended Michigan State University, US, in 1996 and 1997 as part of a scholarship.

"We know that cross-bred cows are more productive than pure-bred cows," he said.

Mr Cooper's recipe for producing Angus hybrid bulls involved taking the best Angus genetics he could source and harvesting embryos by Black Simmental bulls.

He said the result of the Angus and Black Simmental cross was a bull that could offer heterosis in a simple one-bull joining.

Mr Cooper maintained that you could achieve about 60 to 70 per cent heterosis in a herd by continuing to use unrelated hybrid bulls.

In the past cross-bred cattle or hybrids were not recognised by breed societies and as a result didn't have the associated performance recording.

Mr Cooper said the Angus Society of Australia – which boasts the largest cattle database in the southern hemisphere – acknowledged the Angus hybrids.

The Angus hybrid bulls were accompanied by a three-generation pedigree, and DNA parent verification.

Tarcutta's new ET focus

A STRICT selection process at a Tarcutta beef breeding program focuses on the top ten per cent.

Jeremy Cooper, Circle Eight, Tarcutta, pictured with daughter, Annabelle, 4, has embarked on an embryo transfer (ET) program to produce Angus hybrid bulls.

He said the ET program was responsible for allowing him to select the best genetics.

It also meant that top-quality progeny could be produced quickly rather than waiting for years using a painstaking selection process.

To cut down on time Mr Cooper has chosen the best Angus and Black Simmental genetics he could find.

Mr Cooper said the demand for his Angus hybrid bulls would come from people who wanted black and polled cattle that carried hybrid vigour and an Angus premium in the market.

He said beef producers were looking for a competitive edge to improve their businesses during a challenging time.

"In the current challenging climatic conditions heterosis offers commercial producers a pathway

The genetics of the two breeds were then joined using ET to produce Angus hybrid progeny.

The Angus hybrids were evaluated on their conformation and structure.

Coupled together with the visual traits was a whole range of paperwork that had to be just right.

Mr Cooper assessed the cattle for all of their estimated breeding values (EBVs).

Figures from birthweights through to 400-day weight gain were taken into account.

Marketable traits such as eye muscle size, rib fat and marbling were also scrutinised.

to increased profitability and productivity," he said.

"This is opposed to the purchase of additional land or machinery to increase productivity," he said.

Mr Cooper said hybrid cattle had dominated in the US for about 20 years, after taking a lead from the pork and poultry industries.

"The pork and poultry industries realised that pure breeds weren't giving enough performance," he said.

This Week In:



DAIRY

66 Gene marker selections

IN A world first, Genetics Australia is using gene markers to screen their latest crop of Holstein bulls for progeny testing - a process which could ultimately lead to faster genetic gain for their dairy clients.



SHEEP

68 Live export destinations

MURRAY ARNELL travelled with a recent consignment of live sheep bound for Middle Eastern markets. The trip took him all the way to destination feedlots.

Making News

Sheep industry guide

THE AUSTRALIAN Sheep Industry Co-operative Research Centre (Sheep CRC) has produced the Individual Animal Management Learner Guide to help vocational and educational trainers deliver up-to-date information to their students.

Focussing on teachers in the TAFE, agricultural college and school systems, the manual offers training on electronic and computer-aided technologies available to measure, monitor, and manage sheep at commercial and stud levels.

Co-author, Cheryl Pope, NSW Department of Primary Industries, said the technology and applications were cutting edge, and TAFEs provide a great opportunity to bring this knowledge into the sheep industry.

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