



Livestock

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Premium market focus

Quality, not quantity, can save our beef



By NEIL LYON

AUSTRALIAN cattle producers need to stay focused on producing high quality beef rather than try to chase lower-priced, volume markets, according to beef industry consultant, Don Nicol.

Speaking at a recent beef field day at Delungra, Mr Nicol (pictured below) said Australia needed to protect its premium markets and take advantage of its sound reputation for quality product.

"Our breeding, our management, our quality assurance – all these systems we have in Australia give us a strong advantage for producing high quality beef for those people in the world who can afford to pay premium prices," he said.

Mr Nicol said the threat from beef producing countries such as Brazil and the Latin American nations was from quantity, not quality.

"That is why breeders, whether they are straight breeding or cross breeding, have to keep the quality of genetics uppermost in their minds because we can't compete easily in a volume, commodity beef market," he said.

Mr Nicol said while it was important to breed more efficient cattle, producers had to make sure they kept beef quality and carcass genetics at a high level.

"It is not just about performance. We have to balance the breeding of our cattle and keep in mind the high quality attributes," he said.

Mr Nicol said one of the greatest challenges for the industry was the high exchange rate with the US dollar, making it difficult for Australian beef exports to compete on international markets.

The high prices for grain also had a severe impact on the Australian beef industry.



Beware show ring spec

AMERICAN Simmental Association director of performance programs and speaker at a recent field day at Delungra, Wade Shafer, warned Australian cattle breeders what could happen if their breeding lost commercial direction and went too far towards "show ring specifications".

Speaking from his own experience on mistakes made in the US, he said Simmentals in the US were popular throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, but the breed then "lost its way".

"We started breeding cattle that fitted show ring specifications, but were not the kind of cattle the commercial cattlemen needed," he said.

"They were hard calving, the females were excessively large and would eat you out of house and home – in the feedlot they took a long time to finish and they didn't marble very well."

All of which prompted Simmental breeders from around the US to make tough decisions and chart a new

course for lifting the breed from the doldrums.

"We knew we had to make our cattle smaller, at least at maturity, and couldn't have great big cows that were like elephants."

In line with the change in cattle type, breeders had also opened up their stock to comparative scrutiny against animals from other breeds, Mr Shafer said.

"Along with the Simmental sires, we looked at several other breeds, including Angus, Red Angus, Hereford and Gelbvieh."

Mr Shafer (pictured above) said the other big change was to acknowledge the strong preference among customers for solid coloured, black cattle by opening up the breed to Black Simmentals and hybrid Simmental/Angus lines.

"We came to realise if we wanted to have our product tested and used by commercial cattlemen, we had to put it in a form they would be willing to try – and that meant it had to be the right colour."

"We have the situation where the world price for grains, mainly driven through the quick, sharp demand for ethanol, has meant there is a huge increase in the price of cereals," he said.

The impacts from this, which are being seen already, are tied to Australia's large proportion of turnover from feedlots, particularly for the high value long-fed Japan and Korean markets, he said.

"The high marbling required by those markets and the attributes of the meat means we have to long feed for that market in a situation of extreme grain prices."

Mr Nicol said that made it particularly important for grass-fed, feeder stock producers to turn off the best animals they could.

"Pasture management is of supreme importance because, with high grain prices, the backgrounding on grass becomes even more important," he said.

"We have to keep growth rates up so the meat quality comes through in the final product."



Simmental crossbreeds gain popularity

AUSTRALIAN Simmental breeders are following the lead of their US colleagues in addressing the issue of strong customer demand for solid-coloured stock.

Simmental Australia executive officer, Peter Speers, said while there was still a core role for traditional Simmental breeders in

Australia, the numbers of Black Simmentals and Simmental/Angus (SimAngus) cattle were growing.

"I think we will see the increasing use of Black Simmentals and Simmentals to produce SimAngus and the SimAngus product will become increasingly important in the industry," he said.

"There are areas in Australia where the traditional Simmental will continue to be very popular for use in pure breeding and crossbreeding with white-faced breeds in the south and the Bos indicus breeds in the north.

Mr Speers said while there had been Black Simmentals in Aust-

ralia for 20 years, the range of genetics had been limited until the past five years.

"Since then we have been sourcing directly from the US and Canada some of the best Black and Red Simmental genetics we can find," he said.

– NEIL LYON

This Week in:

■ SHEEP

63 | NSW Border Leicesters

A QUALITY line up of Border Leicester rams topped at \$2250 at the third annual NSW Border Leicester Show and Sale held at Dubbo last week.



67 | Monaro Merinos

WITH the Monaro Merino open day and four days of Monaro ram sales just around the corner, *The Land* takes a look at what the region's breeders have to offer.



■ CATTLE

62 | Darkinjung Shorthorn Dispersal

COMMERCIAL and stud cows defied the fluctuating cattle market and sold to a top of \$2000, with bulls selling to \$6500 at the Darkinjung Shorthorn dispersal at the Wodonga saleyards last Thursday.



64 | Kensal Limousin Dispersal

IT WAS standing room only for many buyers at the Kensal Limousin complete dispersal sale at Culcairn on Saturday when prices for females hit a top of \$21,000.



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