

# THE HORMONAL MAIL

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ACN 092435571

P.O. BOX 1181, PHONE: 0741297029/0411201879.  
MARYBOROUGH, QLD. 4650.

Email: [gewyatt@bigpond.com](mailto:gewyatt@bigpond.com)

Website: [www.classiclivestock.com](http://www.classiclivestock.com)

## EDITORIAL

It is always encouraging when we receive feedback from these newsletters. Apart from the fact that it tells us that they are read occasionally, at least, it also lets me know if what we are discussing has any interest to readers. Any suggestions on topics you would like to have discussed are always appreciated because it helps me overcome my blank moments when I can't think of suitable topics. That is usually when I add stuff that I have picked up from my other work and I realise it isn't as captivating as actual information on cattle themselves so I hope you will bear with me when these episodes occur. I've had a couple of readers send me suggestions for future articles so I will work on these in the next 2 – 3 editions.

One of these topics I would like to discuss is about how we can ensure that we can produce grass fed cattle for the market over the full 12 month period of each year in a wider range of environments. Over the last few months we have finally seen an increase in the public awareness of the benefits of eating grass fed meat. With this in mind, producers need to ensure that they are ready to meet an increasing demand. Our minute piece of research in regard to the omega level comparisons between grass and grain fed beef tends to indicate that the move back to grass fed beef has merit. Another indicator of cattle's ability to do well on grass is through linear measurement with the main measurements being the shoulder width matching the rump length or + 2 inches in bulls and heart girth matching the top length. As a company, we are really looking for interest from producers, and have had some already, who would like to be part of what we are proposing in regard to selling Classic graded meat. I am happy to discuss what we are planning with anyone who is interested.

## **WHAT'S (BEEN) HAPPENING**

\*This section is going to be shorter this edition because I am not going to include several of the topics and activities that we have been involved in recently again. Suffice to say that all the company restructure is complete and if you would like to refresh your memories on where that is please refer to the last newsletter. We still have investment memorandums available for interested parties and hope to be meeting with investors interested in developing the beef industry over the next few weeks. There is a growing interest in investment in Australia and Africa in particular from overseas interests keen to ensure security of food for their countries in the future. The same as above applies to our aim to develop a meat marketing system for interested clients. As I have stated previously, we consider our support to any of our clients to establish their own market will otherwise be part of our service.

\*The annual meeting of our company will be held on October the 11<sup>th</sup>. so I hope to be able report any news from that in the next newsletter. If there is any startling news I will send a special note around but I doubt that will be the case.

\* We have just completed our final evaluations on the use of ultra-sound images of the jaw and/or rib bone to translate into a score complimentary to our current hand method of evaluating. We are currently waiting for final confirmation that we will be able to patent this method of identification and that should be through in the next few days. We will then go ahead with the purchase of the first machine.

\*We have applied for an outside site at Beef Week 2015 in Rockhampton next May where we hope to set up a yard and race to

be able to demonstrate the ultra sound machine, linear measuring and other aspects of the system.

\* We are still very keen to hold more field days in localised areas over the next few months so if you would like one in your area, please let myself, Albert Hancock (0267334666) or other company directors know and we will get it under way.

\* During the next couple months I will be travelling south to New South Wales and Victoria again to meet clients and carry out herd evaluations so if there are any producers in NSW and Victoria who would like to catch up, please let me know so I can make sure I have time to call. I will be in the Young area in the week starting 20<sup>th</sup>. October.

I will also be heading back to Central Qld. to do some evaluations for breeders in that general area.

\*I have taken 15 samples of meat and sent to the Victorian Department of Primary Industries for testing using the Warner Bratzler shear force test. These samples came from cattle that were graded prior to processing for bone shape and then taste tested and scored using our system. We hope to have the results to report in the next newsletter. The cost of having these samples tested is always a challenge to meet, but we believe the outcome will prove worthwhile. The main reason for this is to fine tune the tenderness part of our grading system still further. The main focus will be on identifying any tenderness variations when there is a difference in the bone shape on one side of the jaw to the other or variations in shape between the jaw and the rib. We know these differences exist so we feel we need to quantify these more accurately.

\*We are still keen to get some marketing of graded cattle going so we are happy to advertise for any of our clients here in the newsletter.

#We have a client with 21 Red Poll x Droughtmaster heifers for sale for \$650.00 each. They are all graded as 3.5 and 3, are now around 27 months old and average weight around 400+ kg.#

#We also have a client looking for some graded Brahman females so if anyone has any for sale we would be happy to put you in touch with our buyer.#

#Another client has 20 CLMS graded Angus heifers for sale. These are an even line of consistent young females that would be ideal to use to build a herd on.

#We have breeders with some Red Poll x Brahman bulls for sale. This cross is fairly new in Australia and there have been some impressive animals bred over the last 2 – 3 years. There are also breeders interested in purchasing well-muscled Red Poll bulls.

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## **MORE ON GRASS**

I know I've mentioned this topic several times previously, but would like to discuss it again in the light of the ever increasing interest we are getting from our clients in producing fully grass fed meat products. Of course, the huge challenge we have in Australia is to have grass available for 12 months of the year given our huge variations in climatic conditions.

Our evaluation system is based on identifying animals that will perform at a maximum in a pasture fed scenario. Grass and natural herbage is the original basic feed for cattle and what they are designed to perform at their best on. Most of you will appreciate that daily live weight gain is not the be all and end all indicator in having an animal perform at their best and especially breeding stock. Certainly, it is a significant factor in a lot feeding situation. However, there are a lot of factors to consider before an animal reaches the feed lot stage and if these factors are not considered,

then it is on the cards that there may not be an animal to go into the feed lot.

One of the challenges with a purely grass feeding operation is to have grass available all the year round so that our cattle will survive. It is an even bigger challenge to be able to produce animals in a suitable condition to process 12 months of the year. In most climates this is very difficult, if not impossible. To supply a market from the one area for 12 months of the year is what we need to consider when we are looking to produce a purely grass fed meat product. To do so you need to firstly, understand your environment and then work out how you are going to manage it. It is not impossible to succeed. It does need planning and it needs a market that will justify the additional cost to produce meat at a time of year that is either too wet and cold or too dry to produce enough good quality grass so that animals can maintain a good body condition. There are options available to do this that can be adapted to meet your particular conditions.

One of the major hurdles that many producers face in making the necessary changes to adapt to such a system is themselves. The mindset in some countries, especially those that have only been used for organised agricultural practices for the last couple of centuries such as North and South America, South Africa and Australia is that when feed becomes short in supply, we will just open up some new country or buy another property. That is now changing quickly as land for agriculture becomes scarcer. There are lessons to be learnt from countries such as those in Europe who have faced this problem for many more years. There, producers have developed systems and changed their thinking about how they can sustain production over a full year with their limited resources and variations in climatic conditions.

The time is fast approaching or has come in other countries where this will become a major consideration and I guess I will use Australia as an example because I am much more familiar with agriculture there. Whilst Australia doesn't have the severe winter conditions that many northern hemisphere countries do that cause "wet and cold" droughts, it does have extremes at the other end of the scale with "dry and hot" droughts. At present there are a relatively small number of beef producers in this country who have changed their grazing management system so that they can produce beef all the year round.

The surprising thing to many is that they are surviving!!!!

What I am writing here I know is possible through personal experience of being able to turn off finished beef animals year round. Certainly, it was done in a climate very different to that in much of Australia. My experience wasn't with drought so much as with cold and a "green drought". For us to maintain a viable herd for twelve months, we needed to feed conserved high quality grass for about three months of every year minimum and to be able to do this on a more guaranteed basis, we needed to change our practices. In the early 1980's, we introduced controlled grazing and started conserving our grass as high dry matter silage. I know many of you are now saying that your environment is nothing like ours and that is true.

I would like to introduce another "angle" in which to look at this that I believe may be easier to follow – or not. Environment is content and in any system the content can and will change. Other things like breed, age, property size, pasture species etc. are content. What doesn't need to and often won't change is the process, particularly in a broad sense. The process is how we manage our business. How we breed our cattle, when we mark our calves, wean,

muster, sell our calves, yearlings etc. These are the things that we do every year on a regular basis and in the same or similar way. Certainly there will be times when we need to make changes to meet certain circumstances, but generally speaking it is how we do things. The process is the "how" and the content is the "what".

In relation to what we are discussing here, the process is how we develop a sustainable method of production that will enable us to produce for 12 months of the year. In other words, the same process can be used anywhere in Australia given that a couple of adjustments may be needed depending on the environment mainly.

As land for agriculture becomes scarcer and the global demand for food continues to increase, we will need to become more effective in maintaining and increasing productivity levels on the remaining land. The old saying "if we keep doing what we have always been doing, we will keep getting the same outcome" will continue to ring true if we don't look positively at what choices and processes are available to us to keep ahead of the tsunami so to speak i.e. the tsunami of increasing costs, lower returns and climatic challenges. Even as demand increases for beef, producers will not see any possible benefit from increased returns for the end product if they keep doing what they have always done in terms of producing processes and marketing. There are a range of other "competitors" in the meat marketing chain all trying to get as much as they can out of the money "trough" and it is usually the raw material producer who just gets the scraps that remain. The producers who understand this and are not prepared to just accept their lot as price takers are doing something about it, hence the growing number who are finding ways of selling direct to the public. These are the producers who are changing their processes to incorporate management strategies that enable them to produce meat 12 months of the year.

There are two main processes that I have described previously in this newsletter and in our book “The Vision Tender” that will greatly assist in ensuring that you can feed your cattle grass in one form or another all the year round. I won’t go into detail again in describing these processes, but just summarise them here.

The first step in producing more grass on your property is to take control of how (process) your cattle graze the forage available to them at any given time of the year. To date the most successful method is one of the forms of controlled grazing that are becoming more popular. Whether it is an intensive method where stock are moved at least every day onto a fresh pasture or where the grazing interval is longer such as cell grazing and thus the rotation around the given number of paddocks is slower will usually depend on seasonal conditions and the grazing system can be adjusted to cater for those conditions. Even on rangelands, this system can be used extremely effectively as has been demonstrated by Allan Savoury in Africa. These controlled grazing systems lend themselves to a maximisation of grass produced. In the highly intensive systems, such as are used on dairy farms and what we used with our beef operation, it is possible to maintain a very detailed feed budget and maintain a very even quantity of feed availability.

The other process in this system is fodder conservation and I can see many of the larger producers on broader acres having nightmares at the thought of conserving grass. Certainly, in some cases the country just doesn’t lend itself to using machinery to make hay or silage as yet. I believe that the current system of drought relief provided by Government is not providing a long term solution to drought insurance. I have often wondered how far the current amount of money that is spent on drought relief would go towards clearing ground so that it could be cut and conserved. As I drive through the

country, especially in the less intensive agricultural areas, I see country that has been cleared to a certain extent, but never totally cleaned. Trees and shrubs have just been pushed over and left to die and certainly it opens up the canopy so that more grass can grow, but I only see it as a job half done. I think it would be far more effective to use the funds spent on drought relief to establish machine operatable areas on producers properties so that they can not only protect their enterprise against drought, but also store grass so that they can feed some of their cattle so that they have more flexibility in regard to time as to when they market their cattle. They may even be able to turn off prime cattle for processing 12 months of the year. It is up to producer lobby groups and organisations to approach governments now to start such a change regardless of what the seasonal conditions are. This will need planning ahead and implementing as soon as possible. Drought funds could be redirected to assist with land clearance, pasture establishment, machinery purchase or harvesting contracting and storage facilities as well as fencing and water requirements both for stock and even irrigation use.

In our next newsletter I would like to continue this discussion and provide some figures to give an idea of what might happen from a financial perspective if you change your system.

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## **BREED OF THE QUARTER**

### **LUING**

The Luing (pronounced ling) breed of cattle is one of the newer and lesser known British breeds of cattle. They are a breed that, like most of the newer breeds, has been developed through a cross-breeding program involving other breeds. It is a breed developed by the Cadzow brothers on the Island of Luing in Argyll off the west coast of Scotland. The base breeds they used were the Beef Shorthorn, with its fleshing qualities and the Scottish Highlander with its ruggedness and hardiness. They began their breeding program in 1947 by selecting some of the best first cross Shorthorn/Highland heifers that they could be procure. These heifers were bred to a Shorthorn bull. Two sons of this breeding were kept and mated to their half-sisters in 1952 and 1953. From there they followed up this in-breeding with line-breeding so that the Luing breed was firmly established and with many generations sired by Luing bulls, they proved themselves as breeding true to type. The British Government officially recognised the Luing as a breed in its own right in 1965. Since then they have spread world-wide and are particularly well suited to the environments in Canada and New Zealand. They were first introduced into Australia by breeders in North East Tasmania in 1982. They are extremely good at surviving the harshest of weather conditions in terms of excess cold.

The Luing are usually a red-brown colour and are moderately sized and extremely hardy, as might be expected from a breed developed in the western islands of Scotland. The cows range in weight from 550 to 700 kg. at maturity and the bulls are usually in the 700 – 900kg. range. They are very similar in size to the Beef Shorthorn

and most other British breeds. The Luing cow is an efficient and fertile mother. In a cold climate and on hilly country, they have the ability to forage and produce enough milk to raise a calf. They do not have horns unlike the Highland cattle and are therefore less likely to damage themselves or their owners. Their strong bone structure and sound feet are a further "maintenance free" quality.

Overall, the breed requires little supplementary feeding because of their good foraging ability for a grass based system, hold their condition in the winter, regularly breeds 9 – 10 calves or more, have a strong mothering instinct, are fast growing with hybrid vigour, are docile and easy to handle and have a good confirmation.

Luing cattle are well suited to being finished on grass-based systems due to their ability to convert forage into meat in a very efficient manner. They are also very highly rated in two of the most important factors affecting cow/calf profitability i.e. the percentage of calves weaned per cow exposed, and weight of the calf weaned per cow. Luings are among the easiest calvers of the available commercial breeds and have demonstrated to us a high level of grass tetany resistance.

The very heavy hide and thick coat of the Luing makes them more resistant to weather stress than thinner-skinned breeds. The same 'overcoat' also helps to conserve body heat, meaning in cold conditions less feed is needed for converting to heat energy so more of the food intake is available for productive purposes. An interesting aside to note is that in the UK they can suffer from heat stress when fed in barns during winter.

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## **Establishing an elite bull breeding programme**

The following are some thoughts and options on developing an elite breeding herd that is aimed at producing all your replacement offspring for the remainder of your working life. I would like to discuss how we go about determining individual elite herds for each producer and with some of the main traits that we look for. As I have said previously, the ideas and thoughts that we put forward for developing an elite herd need to be moulded into and with your local environment. The following are generalisations in as much as flexibility for local adaptability in your own herd's individual breeding program is concerned is as important as the indicators that we suggest you look for in your selection process. By selecting within your own herd you are also speeding up the herd's ability to adapt to the local environment faster.

I realize that this may not sit too well with stud breeders because their market will decline as more commercial producers start breeding their own replacement stock. However, I believe there will always be some market for them and especially if they adopt these same principals within their own stud herd.

When we start the selection process in a new herd, we usually select for four key traits and within each of these primary traits there are a number of "secondary" traits. We do this as a way to begin the identification of those animals in a herd that will form the start of the elite herd. Experience has shown that as a rule, these selected animals will also be more dominant in many of the other traits we look for. However, we are finding that there is all too often too much variation between traits, not only across a herd itself, but with the individual traits of each animal. In our grading scale, we really don't want a variation of any more than a score of 1 across the board

with the traits in any one animal. I may be off the track when I say that I believe this to be mainly down to the large gene pool that provides the background parentage of those animals, but I can't realistically come up with any other answer. This inconsistency in traits is not what we are aiming for in the herds we work with. When you start breeding and selecting replacements from within your own herd you will naturally reduce the size of that gene pool base and improve the level of repeatability of acceptable traits in the offspring from the herd. If you are breeding on a commercial basis for a market that will benefit from the hybrid vigour that cross-breeding may give you, then this can still be part of your program with no great difficulty. It just means maintaining and developing a core herd of elite animals and then once you have selected the animals you need to keep developing your elite herd you can use the remainder to maintain your other markets.

Once we have made this initial selection and identified those animals that will form the elite part of a herd, we will then start to evaluate using the other traits in our evaluation process to "fine tune" the herd. At the same or similar time, we also encourage producers to linear measure their cattle. This will then identify those breeders in your herd that have the characteristics to breed your replacements from.

What we are finding is that every herd will have a different standard initially. If we just used the one standard on every herd, we would have to set it at a fairly average level or many herds would not have any elite animals. Our interpretation of an elite herd is the elite animals in your individual herd and not compared with other herds. We are confident that regardless of where you start in terms of trait quality, we can improve the herd. It will just take a little longer when a herd has less of the desirable dominant traits present.

Initially, it will also almost certainly mean identifying and buying in a top bull and maybe in some cases a few cows.

If you haven't already got a bull who grades better than your females, then I suggest that you find and purchase such a bull. This bull should be the last bull you need to buy. If you select the right bull for your elite females he will improve the offspring and produce his own replacement. Apart from selecting a bull with all the right confirmation traits and definitely one who is strong in any weaker traits within your cow herd, I would strongly suggest that you also look and if possible, grade his mother and grandmother. They are the mirror for this bull's female progeny and the eventual replacements for your current cow herd. This bull also needs to measure up in terms of fertility and scrotal shape and size and have a prominent epididymis with his teats placed in front of the scrotum. Details of his sperm count and motility are also essential. So often we hear of cows being blamed and culled because they did not get in calf. No thought is given to the fact that it could be the bull that is infertile or low in fertility.

When we grade a cow herd to identify the elite cows, we look at getting around 5% in this herd. Of course, this is only a ballpark figure as it will vary with herds and the management program of each enterprise. On some properties, it is difficult to run more than one herd as is necessary when you start grading your breeding herd into different groups. However, in a worst case scenario, it really only means keeping your elite herd separate for 2 or at the most 3 months during the mating period. The alternative of not doing any of this selective mating is that you are only going to improve your herd at a snail's pace, if at all. That little extra time and effort to carry out a more selective program will definitely pay off very quickly if you are prepared to put it into practice.

Our criteria varies slightly for selecting the elite herd depending on the starting quality (as discussed above) of the herd and the producer's capacity to manage more than one herd of cows. Usually, cows in this herd will at least grade 2.5 or better on our grading system for tenderness and usually 2.5 or better for one of the other three main first evaluation traits i.e. hormonal activity, milk quantity and milk quality. Remember that we give double value for tenderness and hormonal activity in beef cows but not for dairy cows.

The next group is what we call the terminal group. This will consist of cows that grade 3 or 3.5 for tenderness and also have at least one other trait that grades 2.5 or better. When these cows are mated with a bull that is say, a 2 for tenderness we would expect that there could be some of the offspring that could be added to the elite herd in the future. A strong backup herd is important. This group of cows could be kept until your numbers of better cows reach your carrying capacity. Cows that grade less than this in the initial evaluation are classed as culls and should be disposed of as soon as is financially and practically possible and as soon as you have better cows to replace them with. We believe this method of selection and identification will ensure that you are improving your herd significantly and culling with justification those animals that are not going to improve your herd rather than indiscriminate or single trait cull selection. The elite cows in your herd need to be able to produce at least 15 calves for you. Never cull just on age. You may be getting rid of a cow that is capable of producing several more elite calves and a lot more dollars for you.

The plan with an elite herd is to breed heifers that are better than their mothers and replacement bulls that are strongly paternal and

pass on consistency, repeatability and predictability to the herd for the future.

Of course, we are more than happy to evaluate herds using our full evaluation system and linear measuring at the first evaluation. That will give a detailed picture of where your herd is at right at that time. The main difficulty, if you could call it that, is that in most of the herds we have worked with there would be very few elite animals. More like 1% than 5% and this usually adds to management challenges within the whole breeding operation especially given the large gene pools behind most breeds and herds today. I must add that if you only have a small number of animals that grade as elite it is not a reason to be disappointed because we do set a very high standard in each herd for selection as an elite animal. By starting where we do now we just feel that it gives producers a little more flexibility for their management program even though it will certainly take longer to reach a high standard.

Nutrition is important in any breeding program and especially for your elite herd. Lack of nutrition as a calf will lead to structural deficiencies and defects in an animal. Leave the calf on the cow for as long as possible and up to 9 -10 months if seasonal conditions permit. Remember that it is better nutritionally to feed the cow to feed the calf rather than wean the calf and feed it feed which cannot provide it with the butter fat and oil that its mothers milk has. When the calf is weaned, it is important that it has sufficient nutrition until it is at least 18 months of age if it is going to be an effective part of your elite herd. This is because it will still be developing structurally until at least this age.

The calf gets a large percentage of its nutrition from the cow's milk. Aim for a beef cow that will have at least 4% butterfat. It is possible to have your cow's milk tested or you can also use the indicators

that we use to get a strong indication of butterfat yield. These include flakes, preferably yellow in colour in the switch of the tail, bald, oily udders, small, pointed ears with wax in the ears, false teats on the back of udder, small oval feathers just above the rear teats, soft velvet feeling udder and a large escutcheon and handle with soft, fine hair in it.

Cows with high butterfat and oil have high uterine nutrition and this is important for the proper and early glandular development of the calf. These are considerations for all herds, but especially so with an elite herd where the aim is to be breeding replacement bulls for that herd.

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I would welcome any feedback from you on any subject that is discussed in this newsletter. I have had some feedback over the time we have been publishing it and it is most appreciated and helpful. Please keep the feedback and comments coming.

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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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