



BEEF NEW ENGLAND & NORTH WEST SLOPES news

WINTER 2009

NSW Department of Primary Industries, www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/beefnews

A quarterly newsletter for beef producers of the New England and North West Slopes areas of NSW.

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NSW DEPARTMENT OF
PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

Focussing on Your Winter Outcomes

Alastair Rayner, Livestock Officer (Beef Products) Tamworth

The change of season brings its own set of challenges for beef producers in all parts of the state. The significant challenge during winter is managing the nutritional requirements of a breeding herd, and having cows ready for calving and successful joining. It's a challenge which is often easier said than done. However, like most challenges, it can be met and overcome, particularly with good pre planning.

Working with producers in Northern NSW, I have tried to draw together some simple tips which may help this pre-planning and so make the winter challenges easier to manage.

1. Be Outcome Focussed

It's very easy to focus on the tasks at hand, the day to day jobs which take up a lot of time and effort. However, if these tasks are not focussed on an outcome, the effort, time and money poured into a task may be inefficient or wasted. Set some goals to work towards. In a breeding herd the goal should be to maximise weaning percentage of cows joined every year. This goal can then dictate a range of tasks focussed directly on achieving this goal.

For steer producers or backgrounders the goal should be to achieve compliance with market specifications within a defined time period. This goal will dictate target growth rates, ages and breeds. Accordingly the tasks to hit these goals can be more effectively implemented.

2. Know Your Animals Feed Requirements

Achieving any goal with animals is only possible if the animals are fed correctly. Many producers underestimate the daily feed requirements for their cattle. In simple terms producers can be disappointed with growth rates. But in the longer term reduced feed intake can mean longer time taken to meet a market

end point, reduced numbers cycling in the joining period and eventually a reduction in weaning numbers.

Cattle require a minimum amount of energy to maintain liveweight. Once this has been achieved, they need energy for growth, milk production and to lay down fat. Energy demands vary depending on the weight, age and production status of the animals.

To more effectively meet cattle requirements consider drafting cattle into similar groups based on weight, fat score and physiological status.

3. Understand your Feed Supply

Cattle managers really should be focussed on the management of feed for their stock. Investing in and selecting in better genetics is only half the issue for improved livestock performance. Genetics can only be expressed if the nutrition the animal receives allows them to be expressed.

Feed supply is most commonly the pastures that are grown. These are the cheapest forms of feed, and with correct management can meet the targets set for the enterprise. In simplest terms, as already outlined, animal performance is driven by the daily intake of energy. This energy should be balanced with protein.

Energy allows all bodily functions to occur. Protein is used to assist in the development of tissue. However it is also important as it allows the rumen population to survive and function. The rumen bacteria have the role of breaking down the feed eaten by the animal, releasing energy into the system as well as other macro and micro nutrients.

The simplest way to achieve an increase in the energy intake is to manage the quantity of feed available, and the quality. Quality is essentially pasture digestibility. A more digestible feed, such as a green

leafy pasture with very little dead material, will have a higher level of energy and protein. The digestibility of a pasture is directly related to the energy content. As one drops so does the other and so does animal performance.

Knowing how pastures grow, the time of peak growth and no growth allows cattle managers to develop strategies to best utilise their feed to their advantage.

4. Use Supplements Correctly

Supplementary feeds play a key role in grazing management. Correctly used, supplements can help improve pasture utilisation, or minimise the impact of pasture shortages on livestock performance.

Unfortunately most producers don't use supplements correctly. There are two forms of supplementary feeding systems. One based on energy feeding, and one feeding protein.

Protein supplementation is designed to improve utilisation of pasture. It really should only occur when there is sufficient bulk of feed in a paddock (over 1500kg / DM / Ha) and the digestibility is around 60% or below. Without a protein supplement the rumen function is reduced as there is limited protein in the pasture to stimulate the rumen microbes. When this happens the digestive system slows down, intake is reduced, which means the animal gets less energy into the system overall, thus reducing growth or milk production.

A protein supplement can correct this imbalance, stimulating the microbes and ensuring their activity increases. In turn this will increase animal intake and should help maintain growth.

Protein supplements are not designed to meet high levels of production. They are really about minimising weight loss. Because even if intake is kept at a high

level, the poor feed quality has less energy value.

To achieve high levels of production such as finishing stock or maximum milk production, a more suitable option is energy supplementation. Alternatively energy supplements should be fed when pastures fall below 1500kg / DM / Ha.

There are many choices of supplements. It is important to consider the goals of the feeding program. The questions that should be asked include;

What is the feed deficiency?

What are the requirements of the cattle?

What is the cheapest and most effective option?

What feed do I use after the pasture is reduced?

These points are only a few that producers should consider when they start preparing the winter plans. Planning shouldn't happen in isolation. Good plans get bounced around a little and your whole team should be involved.

Farm Ready – Funding for training courses

Alastair Rayner Livestock Officer (Beef Products), NSW DPI, Tamworth

Up to \$1500 is now available through FarmReady

What is FarmReady?

FarmReady is the Australian Government's reimbursement grant program that provides training opportunities for industry organisations, individual primary producers and natural resource management groups to develop strategies to adapt and respond to climate change.

NSW Department of Primary Industries through the PROfarm training program allows eligible participants to claim up to \$1500 to cover course fees for attending FarmReady approved courses each financial year. Funding is also available to cover excess travel, accommodation and childcare costs.

Am I eligible?

Yes, Primary producers, family members, farm management staff and indigenous land managers are eligible.

NSW DPI PROfarm Courses currently approved by FarmReady include;

- Animal health risk management
- Beef-N-omics
- Centre pivot lateral move
- Conservation farming
- Farmers guide to managing climate risk
- Farming in a changing climate
- Farm planning

- Healthy soils, healthy landscapes
- Identification and management of native grass pastures
- Introduction to environmental management systems in agriculture
- Irrigated lucerne for profit
- LANDSCAN
- Management of trunk disease and young vines
- Paddock plants
- Pests and disease in honey bees
- Prograze
- Prograze abridged
- Prograze Plus
- Property management planning for natural resource management
- StockPlan (one day)
- Tactical grazing in semi-arid rangelands
- TopFodder silage
- Waterwise on farm

For information?

Telephone Tocal college C B Alexander campus Paterson on 1800 025520 or Murrumbidgee Rural Studies Centre Yanco on 1800 628422 or visit NSW DPI PROfarm web site www.profarm.com.au to choose a FarmReady approved course or one of the many other PROfarm courses available. Follow the prompts to register your interest.

Full details of the reimbursement grants are available on-line at www.farmready.gov.au



Editorial

Alastair Rayner, Livestock Officer (Beef Products) Tamworth

Farm ready is a new program offered by the Commonwealth government. It is designed to assist farmers to attend training courses which will help meet the challenges of climate change. The funding is quite significant, and can be used to do several courses each year.

Most NSW DPI PROfarm courses, such as PROGRAZE, Beef-n-omics and STOCKplan are all eligible for funding. I'd encourage all producers to access the funds as a way of improving or acquiring new skills.

Coming Events

Ag – Quip August is the month where all roads seem to lead to Gunnedah. Most people in Northern NSW do try to get to AG-Quip, either to see new machinery, or for a day out. If you are over at Ag-Quip this year, NSW DPI will be displaying three heifers bred as part of the muscle research trial, currently at Glen Innes.

These heifers illustrate what can be achieved when selecting for muscle in your herd. Research has shown there is an average price difference per muscle score of \$0.15 / kg at the same weight and fat for cattle sold through the saleyards. Premiums for muscling can be achieved across all classes of stock, including cows.

Also at Ag-Quip will be the latest publications from the Beef CRC in Armidale, including a newly released publication, "On the Growth Path to Profit". The stand will be manned by myself and other beef cattle officers to answer questions on either the heifers, the Beef CRC and several of our cattle specific DVD's. So, if you are interested in learning more and you have time during Ag-Quip, please drop in.

Handling Beef cattle – Now on DVD

Alastair Rayner, District Livestock Officer (Beef Products), NSW Department of Primary Industries - Tamworth

Safely handling cattle is a skill which all producers should aim to possess. Cattle handling skills are often neglected. Poor handling skills can lead to frustration, disappointment and stress. Often these feelings are felt by livestock as much as by handlers.

While many people try to improve their skills, finding information on new methods, can be difficult.

As part of the PROfarm courses offered by NSW DPI, a two day course specifically designed for handling stock has been developed.

Known as StockSafe, the course covers topics such as:

- Occupational Health and Safety
- Animal behaviour and handling
- Animal Welfare
- Animal handling and meat quality

The StockSafe course has been delivered across NSW to groups which include Landcare groups, Livestock agents, stock carriers and abattoir staff.

As a PROfarm course, StockSafe is eligible for funding under the new Farm Ready scheme, outlined earlier in the newsletter.

Following the success of the two day course, NSW DPI has developed a DVD which demonstrates the handling techniques used during the course. The DVD allows course participants to review and remember the skills they have been taught. For others, the DVD offers insights into new techniques and can provide ideas to improve handling skills.

The DVD is available through the NSW DPI's bookshop. For more information or to obtain a copy, call the bookshop on 1800 028 374.

An Opportune time to Clean Up Your Pastures

Loretta Serafin, District Agronomist, NSW DPI, Tamworth

Winter is often the time when summer growing pastures in particular the native species like Queensland bluegrass and redgrass are neglected. We overgraze them in order to fill a feed gap or often ignore them to focus on our winter forages which are providing much of the quantity and quality of feed our livestock need in the colder months.

In grass only pasture species, which are dormant in the winter, there is a window of opportunity to control some of our more common weeds cheaply. In particular saffron thistles, Paterson's curse, Turnip weed (*brassica* spp.) and Bathurst burrs often grow unhindered during these winter months.

Unfortunately when spring arrives we have often missed an ideal opportunity to do the groundwork which will enable us to utilise these pastures to their best.

When pastures are dormant there is also little competition to hinder the germination of weed and ground cover can be run down below our preferred levels.

To combat these problems, implement a grazing plan and supplementary feeding to help offset the pressure on your summer pastures. Inspect your pastures

and take note of which weeds have germinated; as many have following the recent rains. Cheap and effective herbicide options are available for many weeds when they are small and actively growing.

If you don't want to use herbicides then make the decision now about the alternative control option you want to use. This might include slashing, manually chipping (where feasible) or grazing. You can even use some control options in combination with herbicides to achieve an integrated weed management plan.

The important step is to realise that currently you have options, when the weeds are flowering and setting seed, your options will be either very limited or non-existent.

Once your problem weeds are under control your pastures will be in better condition for grazing. The next step is to focus on addressing any nutrient deficiencies and you can consider adding legumes to boost your winter feed in the coming years.

So, now is the time to inspect your pastures and plan how you will stop the weeds setting seed this season.

Strengthening the Reputation of Grassfed Beef

Alastair Rayner, District Livestock Officer (Beef Products) NSW DPI, Tamworth

Australian cattle producers have earned international recognition for the quality and consistency of their beef products. Recent developments including the implementation of Meat Standards Australia has improved consumer confidence in the selecting a consistent, tender flavoursome product for their meals.

The enhancements achieved in production, processing, and retailing of beef have allowed the development of recognised beef brands. These brands are used to market product, and highlight the regions where beef is grown, the breeds and even the feeds the animals consumed. Marketing beef in this way truly highlights how sophisticated both the industry and consumers have become when choosing beef products.

For brands to maintain consumer confidence it is imperative the beef sold under a brand name actually is the product described. The sophistication of consumers and their willingness to research the products they wish to purchase place greater pressure than ever on ensuring the product matches the label.

The current challenge for many Australian producers is to describe what is actually meant by claims such as grass-fed beef. All cattle in Australia consume grass or crops at some stage in their lifetime. However the generic term grass-fed may not truly reflect the

program the animal was grown and finished under. This lack of reflection could be seen as weakening a brands claim of grass fed product.

In order to strengthen the integrity of brand names, the Cattle Council of Australia is working to create a product description which clearly describes grass-fed product. It is anticipated that the standard will be known as Premium Grass Fed Beef, and will be based on the following claims:

1. Grass fed only: Grass and forage is the feed source consumed for the lifetime of the animal. Animals are not fed grain or grain by products and always have continuous access to pasture. Hay and silage are acceptable feeds as long as there is no grain in either types of feed.
2. Lifetime free from Hormone Growth Promotants (HGP) and Antibiotics: Animals will never be treated with a HGP. No antibiotics will be administered from birth to slaughter. If an animal needed antibiotics for welfare reasons it would be excluded from the program.
3. Lifetime traceability: All cattle must be traceable from property of birth through to slaughter using NLIS

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4. Eating Quality Assured: All animals must be graded through the Meat Standards Australia (MSA) standards. Individual cuts which do not grade MSA will not be able to be described as Premium Grass Fed beef.
 5. No Confinement: The cattle must never have been confined in an intensive feeding system.
 6. 3rd party Quality Assured: programs wishing to produce cattle for the Premium Grass fed standard must participate in a Quality Assurance Program which is subject to 3rd party audits. It is anticipated the most

common QU program will be the Livestock Production Assurance (LPA) Quality Assurance Program.

The Cattle Council of Australia is working with industry bodies and Meat & Livestock Australia to refine these standards. It is anticipated that the Premium Grass Fed Beef standard will join AUS-Meats national descriptors, which are well known and recognised nationally and internationally. When implemented they will provide a clearly defined standard which can be not only a target for beef producers to aim for, but will underpin and give credibility to brands wishing to sell grass fed beef to consumers in Australia and overseas.

Growth Predictor Covers More Beef Breeds

Bill McKiernan, Research leader, Animal Production, NSW DPI, ORANGE

More beef producers can now benefit from a simple tool that predicts the future growth path of cattle - significantly improving profits. The simple BeefSpecs tool aims to help producers meet target market specifications with a greater proportion of their cattle by predicting cattle fatness and weight.

Up to 25 per cent of cattle currently fall outside market specifications, costing producers as much as \$30 per head, and the beef industry more than \$100 million a year.

The tool has been developed by the [Beef CRC](#) in conjunction with NSW DPI and was initially launched for British breed steers, and has now been upgraded to include Brahmans and other *Bos indicus* cattle and their crosses, and heifers.

Extensive research on cattle growth and development in the past 30 years has led scientists to develop predictive models which mimic cattle growth and fat deposition.

The tool requires initial inputs by the producer on the current status of animals including live weight, current P8 fat depth or fat score, frame size and breed type. The producer then only needs to enter some simple management intentions like feed type, how long the finishing period is expected to be and the expected growth rate of the cattle during that period.

Once entered, the tool instantly reads out predicted final live weight, carcass weight and P8 fatness. The aim is to assist producers to make management decisions before and during finishing to achieve the desired end product.

Producers willing to participate in the further development and refinement of BeefSpecs, and benefit from what it can already deliver, are urged to contact their local NSW DPI beef officer for assistance in using the tool and collecting data to test outcomes.

Access the [BeefSpecs calculator](#) via the Meat and Livestock Australia website.