

## **A BEEF BREEDER'S PERSPECTIVE ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE PROSPECTS**

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### **SUMMARY**

Australia has a unique range of genetic material suitable for the range of tropical and sub-tropical regions found across the World. This range includes cattle for the harsher regions such as the Brahman as well as for the more favoured areas in the tropics and sub-tropics such as derived breeds from crossing Brahman cattle with British and European breeds.

The technology and support structure is available to supply disease-free live cattle, semen and embryos as well as seedstock material of known genetic merit.

While export markets for live cattle and seedstock material are being serviced it is felt that the full potential of such markets will be realised only by better organisation of key groups. Activities such as locating potential markets, verifying specifications, after-sales service to ensure expression of genetic potential need to be expanded and coordinated.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Approximately half of the Australian beef herd is found in the tropical and sub-tropical regions of the continent. The climate of these regions ranges from hot and dry (annual rainfall less than 400 mm, summer temperatures greater than 40°C) in northern and western areas to hot and humid (rainfall greater than 1000 mm, summer temperatures greater than 35°C) in the northern coastal areas. In addition to the high summer temperatures and variable rainfall, constraints such as cattle ticks, worms and pink eye make for a harsh environment for beef cattle.

The relationship between prices received for beef and costs of production (e.g. machinery, fuel, feed stuffs, labour) has forced producers to devise and adopt least-cost methods of production. Also, the largest proportion of beef produced in the tropical and subtropical regions is exported and prices received vary considerably and hence further demand for the least cost productive methods.

As a result of the environmental constraints, beef producers have developed breeds of cattle best suited to the environment and to markets for beef. This approach started in the 1940's and in cooperation with scientists, beef producers have developed a wide range of breeds that will produce beef to meet most markets available.

These breeds have the potential to contribute to beef production over the wide range of environments found across the tropical regions of the world.

### **AVAILABLE BREEDS**

The Brahman has been the foundation for most of the tropical breeds found in Australia. Australian Brahmans have been developed from seedstock from the USA, Mexico and Brazil. Selection programmes

by breeders have resulted in a breed particularly suitable for beef production in the harsher regions of the tropics and sub-tropics. This breed is also a foundation for composite breeds developed for the less harsh areas in the tropics and sub-tropics.

Breeds such as Braford, Brangus, Droughtmaster, Greyman, Santa Gertrudis etc. were developed from crossing Brahman with Hereford, Angus, Shorthorn, Murray Grey and Shorthorn respectively. All except the Santa Gertrudis were developed by Australian breeders. Other similar breeds available include Belmont Red (Africander crossed with Hereford and Shorthorn) and Saford (Sahiwal crossed with Hereford). These breeds are particularly suitable for the more intensive areas in tropical Australia such as the brigalow belt in southern Queensland and northern New South Wales. Naturally, this suitability could be extended to similar regions across the world.

The imports of seedstock material from European breeds such as Charolais, Limousin, Saler and Simmental in the 1970's lead to development of larger tropically adapted breeds. These include Brahmousin, Braler, Charbray and Simbrah and are based on Brahman. These breeds have added growth and a lean meat dimension to the suite of breeds available.

Thus, Australian cattlemen have on offer a unique range of breeds adopted to a wide range of environments found in tropical and subtropical regions. It is important to recognise that these breeding programmes are supported by a complete research programme by independent organisations such as CSIRO and State Departments of Agriculture. Additionally, breeder participation in the National Genetic Evaluation Scheme, BREEDPLAN, ensures that buyers have access to independent estimates of economically important traits such as growth, fertility and carcass attributes. Hence, they can make informed decisions concerning their choice of seedstock material.

#### **POTENTIAL BREEDS**

During the late 1980's Australian cattlemen together with CSIRO imported Boran and Tuli cattle from southern Africa. Currently, these breeds are being evaluated by a group of cattlemen in cooperation with CSIRO. At present semen is available for export and in the future other tropically adapted breeds could emerge to add to the suite of such breeds available to beef producers.

#### **HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS**

Australian cattle are largely free from major diseases found in other areas of the world. Every effort is made to maintain this freedom from disease by a comprehensive health programme supervised by veterinarians and State Departments of Agriculture and CSIRO. Also diagnostic services are available to ensure that health requirements of potential client countries can be met.

#### **EXPORT EXPERIENCE**

During the past decade or more Australian producers and support organisations such as stock and station agencies and veterinary health authorities have developed considerable expertise in supplying export orders of live cattle, semen and embryos. Already a considerable number of cattle and seedstock material are being exported to various markets, especially to south east Asian markets. This trade is set to expand, provided that the same dedication and skills to production are applied to marketing. However, this potential will be realised only if producers supply to the specifications of the clients and provide after-sales service and ensure cattle which are exported have the opportunity to express their genetic potential.

While producers have the major responsibility to ensure that their products meet the approval of clients, a viable trade in live cattle and genetic material will eventuate only by the combined effort of a number of groups. Efforts of producers need to be supported by marketing organizations such as AMLC, QDPI and technical groups from State Departments of Agriculture to cover such aspects as health, after-sales service, pre-sale handling, verification of specifications, and specialist exporting agencies. In other words, successful and sustained export of live cattle and genetic material depends on a coordinated effort - individual producers and exporting agencies do NOT have the resources to do this alone.