



CBV 04-2351



CBV Update...

Predictable, Functional Genetics....

Fertile, Gentle, Growthy & Adapted....

As we approach Christmas we are fortunate enough to be looking at green grass on all our properties. In the dry tropics we always think of any rain before Christmas as a real bonus. The properties in the Marlborough area have received 179mm in the last three weeks and the others from 30 to 75mm. All cows that were preg tested in calf but did not deliver a live calf have been culled so now only the working cows can enjoy the green grass. This is very important for genetic gain and cash flow.

It seems the global economic crisis has started to filter into the cattle market with fat cattle taking a slide. It looks to me like we are sailing into unknown territory and no one knows what to expect. The positive we can take out of this is it highlights the need for adapted cattle and low input management practices. Don't spend money on cattle for things that you can cut out by using better genetics with tight management. Increased weaning rates for the same cost is the easiest way to lower cost of production I know. This can be done with management and genetics.

There are far too many bulls used in the cattle industry with no information on the ability of the females they were bred from to wean calves every year.

The importance of this kind of thinking is always there, only in good times it is sometimes overlooked for things of less or no economic importance. As we have always stated at CBV, have cattle and management systems that work well in the tough times and the good times will take care of themselves.

I recently visited New Caledonia with some other cattle producers on a trip organ-

ized by Helen Newell and John Bertram from QDPI.

The country where the cattle herds run is 800mm to 1300mm of rain situated in the tropics running 1 head to 1-2 Ha on improved pastures. There is still a lot of pasture work being done at present. The improved pastures look beautiful with a lot of Brachiaria used with some Rhodes, Pangola and stylo. The unimproved areas were running around 1 head to 3 Ha mostly Eurochloa.

Because of the French ancestry the breeds are mostly Charolais and Limousin.

The preferred meat eaten is veal so there is a real need for high reproduction to fill this market. At present they are importing some veal from Australia. About half the cattle are slaughtered as veal and half as steers. All sold on a flat rate basis.

Progressive New Caledonians have embraced the importance of using tropical breeds as a genetic management strategy to reduce both the parasite burden and the need for chemical control within their herds. Like any cattle producer, finding genetics of the right breed with depth of information on economic traits (fertility, adaptation and resistance) has been their major challenge. Cattlemen are now seeking to implement tighter management of their breeder herds.

CBV, with its proven track record, has a significant role in design and delivery of these core strategies. With these two factors working together and high domestic demand for their product the future for New Caledonian cattle producers looks very bright indeed.

The New Caledonian people are very hospitable and generous hosts. I thank them for a most enjoyable visit to their beautiful country.

From us all at CBV I would like to wish you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, with plenty more rain to come.

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Alf Collins Jr



“Every station I traveled through was staffed with resolute young men and women, *happy to be there, and determined to make good* of whatever cards they were dealt.”

No doubt about it, we live on a dry continent, and an island to boot.

Life on a desert island is the stuff of dreams. Yet the innovation and determination that island dwellers have become famous for in history is part of what I was privileged to see on a recent road trip to NW Qld and Barkly Tableland then back through some of the Georgina River system, in early October, 2008.

From just west of Julia Creek on, the country looked a bit moon-scapey, and so did some of the cattle. Some properties have had just 2 inches for the season, and for some there has not been a solid grass season for 5 years. Even so, it is interesting how good luck seemed to plague the land and its management; whoever had started out with a plan early in the season and concluded it on time.

From the west side of the Barkly to Threeways, NT I headed roughly north and east through Banka Banka, Brunchilly, Helen Springs, Eva, Anthony’s Lagoon, and Brunette. I had a good look at the cattle

and country, with some illustrative conversations.

From there I headed southeast through Alexandria, Soudan, Avon and Austral, Lake Nash, and on down the Georgina through Headingly, and Carrandotta, with a quick stop in Urandangie for fuel. From Linda, Roxborough, Glenormiston and Marion Downs a bit further south then I headed east to Bouli.

I had heard some of the bad-news stories this year from the Barkly; the success stories were infinitely more interesting...

I had been through some of these regions in previous years, in reasonable seasons. I have vivid memories traveling through Headingly in May, about eight years ago with Tom Copely and Euan Ferguson summing up the fattest large herd I have ever seen, of prime Santa cows with Angus calves in boot high green grass and herbage. This year, that property is bare, with no useful season since I last saw it, and has been progressively destocked. It was illustrative to see this again, and several others of the herds and properties I had previously visited, and now under severe seasonal challenge.

One concern I had as I returned home is that the level of bos Indicus or Zebu blood has diminished on

some properties consequently swinging away from Brahman to various crosses, composites and ‘flat-backs’; and that was leaving the business wide open to savage losses. Some of these losses are subtle, yet cumulative and erosive to the ‘bottom line’. In my experience the effects of heat, humidity and seasonal poor nutrition are enough to diminish margins in growth, reproduction, and survival.

Reasons quoted for this change were market suitability, eating satisfaction, feed lot acceptability, and higher reproduction than the straight Brahmans they had used at that time. There were good and understandable reasons for wanting to make a change from the status quo. In many cases reproduction, fleshing, and temperament were sub-optimal. My observations are that this move to hairy or flatback cattle has not increased the per hectare earning capacity either, as hoped. The loss of adaptation in the tropics has saddled managers with calves that need shade, post

weaning weight loss, extended mustering times, heat stress in handling, and emaciated cows in prolonged dry times. Lighter stocking rates have helped to cover some of these deficiencies, but land area or ‘beast area’ is a significant cost to the whole business.

Of course every one in production swung into action to overcome these problems as best they can. They start work earlier, build calf shade shelters at waters, and freight cows out to sale rather than lose them.

I wondered if these policy decisions could be redesigned with a view of lifting returns per hectare, reducing costs and stress, and minimizing risk on the herd and the business.

There is room for rethink on the levels of adaptation, productivity, and costs per kg produced, not just on the breeding stations, but on the downstream finishing entities.

I am not promoting monumental humps, ears, colour, or breed prejudice; that is the domain of breed societies and pedigree breeders. We at CBV are considered to be fiercely commercial cattlemen, with a very marketable genetic result. Since the inception of CBV, we have travelled extensively in the cattle regions of Australia and the world, to have a comprehensive knowledge of our commercial clients and potential clients business. This makes CBV a valued supplier of genetics that really make a difference.

During the nineties I traveled over most areas of northern Australia, from Broome to the Peninsula, often with John Rains. Every evening we would discuss and dissect the economics, logistics and

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opportunities as we saw it. Generally Brahman based herds were the standard. Often the rate of reproduction was not adequate, but the cattle were tough enough to work cheaply and quickly, and fit to withstand the heat and humidity in our important Asian markets.

At that time at CBV we decided to accelerate our strategy of selection by analysis, and I am very glad we did so, in the field of reproduction, survival, fleshing, and production per hectare per unit of rain

My take home message was that our own CBV Brahmans at least, must be fast breeders, strong survivors, naturally fleshy, quiet natured, and acceptable to grass or grain feeders alike. We have achieved this at CBV.

To make a profit anywhere in a good season is relatively easy, but when you throw in a few wild cards, then the equation alters. Wild cards can come from politics, weather, markets, and international terms of trade, distance to water, feed or markets, and public perception. Extend a dry season for two to five years, long distance to markets and from supplies; then the equation alters again.

Distance to water or to grass is not easily or cheaply solved, given the lighter carrying capacity of our inland country. In these very dry seasons new water distribution has been one of the quickest changes. The costs of pumping, delivery, storage, and ongoing maintenance demands at least 300 head per water, preferably a minimum of 500 head for best economics; this puts pressure on cattle, grass, staff time, and 'bottom line'. The results this year were that cost per kilogram increased just when interest rates rose, and cattle prices dropped. Testing times.

I have a profound appreciation of the time and effort that people made to welcome me, and to share with me a broad perspective of the operations they run. That came from all levels, from the 'first-years' to regional managers, wives, bore-runners and contractors.

Every station I travelled through was staffed with resolute young men and women, **happy to be there, and determined to make good** of whatever cards they were dealt.

For me, the stand out of the whole trip was the 'candoo' young men and women that run that part of Australia. They can be justifiably proud of their achievements, especially under the stresses of the last two years. Some have been reared there, and some have gravitated there, seeking challenge and opportunity. They find both. Wherever there are challenges, opportunity beckons. The right people are responding.

We are living in interesting times globally, yet amongst all the chaos, good management and sound strategies are the stand out winners. Amongst the chaos, you will notice opportunities, and our beef industry is not excluded from seizing opportunities.

In our own business, at CBV, we have sought to breed only the most adapted cattle, to counter most of the factors that could erode our bottom line. That has been adaptation, reproduction, gentle temperament, and survival traits. At CBV the composites are expected to operate at the same levels of stress as the most adapted of the bos Indicus. Initially a high percentage on the composites did not measure up, despite the promises from academics. The survivors are ok now. A large part of this change was to increase the percentage of zebu blood in our composites and to put more pressure on our composite sire inputs. (Refer to CBV Newsletter # 9)

This is where cattlemen will find productive opportunities using CBV bulls. They have resulted from many years of selection through low-cost & highly productive management. In these challenging times it makes a lot of sense to consider carefully where your bulls come from. Bulls are herd changers. The necessity to innovate in management is becoming more obvious now, under the harsh glare of costs, risk, and diminishing returns.

We have been focused on challenges and solutions for decades, and CBV cattle are illustrative of the rewards of strong management. Make a point of visiting CBV soon. The herds are interesting and our data is solid; we are committed to supplying genetics based on outstanding levels of function.

If you are unsure of what we have to offer, contact us direct. We will be happy to discuss your achievements, and your goals.

On a personal note I would like to thank each and every person who has engaged with us in discussion, stimulation, visits and general cattle business throughout 2008. A busy and challenging year in the cattle industry, it is still the most enjoyable profession I can imagine, and worthy of our best minds to continue to unravel the complexities within and beyond our barb-wire. I have a deep and profound respect for the people, the land, and the livestock that aggregate our great beef industry. I wish you all a joyous Christmas with your families, and the rain and good spirit for a prosperous 2009.

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CBV is committed to supplying quality genetics to our clients. Your feedback and thoughts are appreciated.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed people can change the world; indeed it's the only thing that ever has. (Margaret Meade)

From CBV we all would like to wish you and your families a joyous Christmas and a safe & prosperous New Year.



We would like to expand the contact list for our newsletter distribution. We would appreciate email or postal addresses of progressive and interested people.

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Thank you, Dallas...