



Wirruna Poll Hereford Stud (est. 1949)

# WIRRUNA NEWS

Newsletter

Summer 2000/01

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## Key points:

- US herd remains in decline into 2002
- Demand & supply conditions for Australian beef remain buoyant
- Use these good times to prepare for the next downturn

## Dates for Diary:

- **Beef Week Field Day**  
*Thursday 1st Feb 2001*
- **Bull Sale**  
*Thursday 22nd Feb 2001*

## Prospects remain bright for 2001

The beef industry prospects in Australia remain buoyant. Strong domestic demand, improved export competitiveness, renewed growth of live cattle markets and a general shortage of well-finished cattle have provided a much needed momentum into our industry. This situation should be extended while the US continues to slaughter large numbers of females and are not expected to start rebuilding their national herd until 2003.

On the domestic front it is good news to hear that doctors and nutritionists are advising that beef is an important component in peoples diets, many restaurants are again placing beef as their top menu item and that the decline in per capita beef consumption has abated. The Meat Standards Australia (MSA) grading system has the ability to deliver guaranteed tender steaks and is used to underpin brands such as Hereford Prime. This system is recognised overseas as a world class grading system and hopefully the ongoing roll out adds to the healthy outlook domestically.

These good times offer the ideal opportunity to get your house in order. The reward for working smarter in these times are far more to your benefit than working harder in less profitable times. It is important to remain focused on the controllable factors that drive the profit in your

beef business, namely, beef produced per hectare and the cost to produce a kilogram of beef. Why not start benchmarking your beef enterprise?

Genetically, this is a good time to tune up your genetic pool in breeding herds. Service test your sire battery, cull out and trade-in old and high cost/little benefit sires that do not suit your breeding objectives and target markets.

Prudent long term female culling strategies for fertility and calf rearing performance should remain unaltered. Nevertheless, if you are inclined to dig deeper to improve the quality and functional efficiency of your herd, now is not a bad time to do it!

It must be remembered that the bull you use over your breeders this year will have saleable progeny in 2 to 3 years and have an influence over your herd for the next 15 years. What will the beef market be like then?

*Ian Locke*



## Beef Week Field Day

Once again we open the front gate and have much of our herd available for inspection during the Beef Week Field Days. This year we are open from 9.00 am to 6.00 pm on Thursday, February 1, 2001 (Day 4).

This represents an ideal opportunity to inspect our up and coming sale bulls. As standard policy, these bulls have been commercial reared and assessed and have received no grain feeding.

We are proud to show you our cow herd of 250 breeders, which is selected for high fertility, moderate size and balanced traits under a high stocking rate environment.

Catalogues for our Thursday, February 22, 2001 bull sale will be available at the Field Day, or can be obtained by calling Ian Locke on (02) 6036 2877 or fax (02) 6036 3060, email [wirruna@albury.net.au](mailto:wirruna@albury.net.au).



## EBV Talk

Performance testing was introduced as part of a system to measure economically important traits of fertility, growth & carcase merit. According to internationally renowned beef industry commentator and judge, Dr Harlan Ritchie, Professor of Animal Science at Michigan State University, United States; Australia's performance recording system, Breedplan, is the best in the world.

day growth EBV's over +60 (larger frame cows) generally drop out of the system. These often go as non-pregnant heifers and when fed gets tight. Likewise, cows with Milk EBV over +12 rarely survive in our herd. Often they fail to rejoin while lactating with their first calf. The higher milking heifers take longer to begin to cycle. Older high milk cows are also susceptible to milk fever or grass tetany.

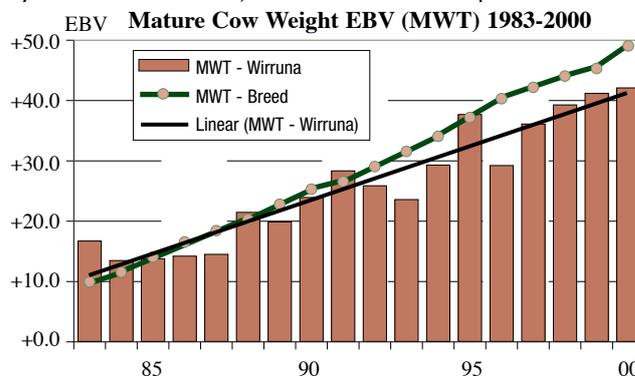
"EBV Trait leaders for growth are at maximum for an EBV range. Many breeders mistake this as been optimum . . . Which in fact is closer to breeder average."

Bob Freer, Taurus Technology

Breedplan takes the guesswork out of selection decisions, as you can't see an animal's genes, and can be used in conjunction with your own abilities as a stockman.

The trade-offs to selecting excessive growth include higher birthweights and larger frame scores, both of which lower reproductive

Wirruna Poll Herefords was a foundation member of Breedplan in 1972 and with over 5,000 animals recorded has built a reputation for fully described & predictable genetics. EBV's are a valuable tool in our cattle enterprise.



However, it is unfortunate that EBV's are now being adopted . . . in the big end of town, as a means to seek out extreme trait leaders and market them out as 'best'. The question is . . . best for what? Best for that trait, maybe; best for the long term profitability of a commercial breeding herd, unlikely.

rates in commercial herds. The above graph of mature cow weight EBV's highlights the breeds insistence of selecting out high growth cattle without due consideration to the trade-offs. The fact that the Wirruna MWT EBV's are falling well below the breed average (while maintaining 600 Day EBV at breed average) is no accident. **Beware the EBV Race!**

At "Spring Valley", the Wirruna herd is run at 15.2DSE/Ha. This compares to a Holbrook district average stocking rate of around 10 DSE/Ha. Our experience is that cattle with 600

"EBV's greater than +60 for 600 Day growth +12 for Milk do not tend to stay in the Wirruna Herd"

The first female sale for the Wodonga Hereford Breeders is to be held on Thursday 25th January 2001. About the time you receive this newsletter.

entries must be purebred Hereford and/or Poll Hereford and A/c 'The Breeder' only (no trade cattle).



There is not another commercial whiteface sale held like this one. Our committee has strong foundations as it is producer and vendor driven – we organise and control the sale with minimum conditions to be met by all vendors to protect the integrity of the sale and grow a reputation with the buyers. All



This sale gives breeders who have carefully selected and built up their genetics an outlet to value-

add their surplus females. Our committee has been delighted with the interest the first sale has created and we look forward to creating a marketing option that breeders can plan for in their yearly program.

## Managing Heifer Nutrition

In recent years, many herds in south eastern temperate Australia have shifted to spring calving in an attempt to better match animal feed demands to feed supply, and to better meet heavier market specifications with steers.

One of the challenges that this adjustment puts forward is calving dystocia. Quite often, split joining herds that use the same set of sires have very few calving problems in Autumn and a pull alot of calves in Spring.

In the Wirruna Herd, we had Autumn & Spring joining cows for decades until 1999. The average birth weights of heifers' calves & dystocia levels of the heifers for our last 2 years of split joinings are summarised in the following table.

Calving Season	Ave Birth Weight (kg)	% Dystocia in Heifers
Aut 1997	34.2	8%
Spr 1997	35.8	20%
Aut 1998	33.6	9%
Spr 1998	36.9	26%

The birth weight differences are even more pronounced in older cows calves. Our Holbrook vet, Dr Reon Holmes, says that in his experience Spring calves are 3 kg heavier on average than Autumn calves. "This is often enough to push heifers over the edge".

Given that the bull genetics are equal, the reason for this difference in birth weights is largely nutrition of the heifer during pregnancy. A paper, presented based on the PHD thesis "THE EFFECT OF RAINFALL DURING GESTATION OF THE CALVING ABILITY OF EXTENSIVELY GRAZED BEEF HEIFERS", undertaken by S.T. Norman & R.C.W. Daniel at the University of Qld, studying heifers in south-east QLD, offers the following summary:

"... heifers experiencing above average rainfall in the first two trimesters followed by below average rainfall in the third trimester appear to have low calf birth weights and moderate calving assistance. This is in contrast to heifers experiencing below average rainfall in the first two trimesters followed by above average rainfall in the third trimester, which experience high mean calf birthweights and higher levels of calving assistance."

From the study, Reon concludes that:

- Heifers that experience lower nutrition in the 1st trimester have larger calves and more dystocia. The reason being that nature's way is for these heifers to lay down a larger placenta, which more efficiently feeds the foetus.
- Heifers that experience less nutrition in the 2nd trimester have greater dystocia, simply because they are less likely to grow out skeletally.
- Heifers that have less nutrition in the 3rd trimester have lesser calf weights and associated dystocia as this is when the foetus is most responsive to nutrition.

"The ideal situation is even and adequate nutrition throughout pregnancy" Reon says, "It is large variation in nutrition that is likely to create more problems at calving, particularly high nutrition in the final trimester."

Our target at Wirruna Poll Herefords is a dystocia rate of 15% in 2 year old heifers. Under that figure, we are not challenging our heifers enough, higher than 15% becomes economically and emotionally frustrating. As a reaction to higher levels of dystocia in Spring over recent years, last year we strictly managed nutritional intake of the heifers with improved results, particularly lowering average birthweight.

Calving Season	Ave Birth Weight (kg)	% Dystocia in Heifers
Spr 1999	38.7	22%
Spr 2000	32.8	11%

The balance of hills and flatter country at "Spring Valley" is fortunate for the Wirruna herd as pregnant spring breeders are run on more improved pastures until May and then run in the hills on more native country over winter. Without starving the heifers in the last trimester, they tend to get fit and lose fat approaching a condition score at calving of around 2 1/2 to 3.

With Wirruna's change to spring calving, we better challenge and screen out cattle for dystocia. From the clients perspective, specialist heifer bulls should only be selected from spring calving herds that have a rigorous policy of culling any female requiring assistance at calving.

Spring calving herds buying Autumn herd selected heifer bulls represents a higher risk of dystocia due to less birth weight challenge.

*"Commercial herds should aim for between 5% to 10% dystocia. In contrast, seedstock herds should place a greater birthweight challenge on heifers and cull accordingly"*

**Catalogue on the Web  
www.pollhereford.com.au**



## Assuring the Best Quality Product BRIAN CUMMING, NSW AG, ALBURY



The number of beef herds accredited under the Cattlecare Quality Assurance Scheme has certainly increased in the last year.

For some of the innovators that boldly adopted Cattlecare in its initial period, their fourth annual audit is upon them.

Four years down the track, and with more audit fees soon, it's easy to become frustrated when there have been few premiums for Cattlecare stock.

It's important to remember that getting a big more money is not the issue for big picture thinkers.

Cattlecare should be adopted to ensure the product is safe for those that eat it.

It's about maintaining consumer confidence and share in the product, and a belief that what you are producing excels in all measurements of quality.

Audit time should be viewed as another change to show you're a quality producer.

Are there any products that you buy and rely on for yourself or your family that you don't want to carry some form of quality assurance?

*Phase 1, 1993-1999, of the CRC project involved an investment of \$60m. A new phase of the CRC 1999-2006 has since begun.*

Albury Wodonga Beef Improvement Association

### **Bovine Johnes Disease (BJD)** *Update for local beef cattle producers*

*Date:* 15 February 2001  
*Where:* Commercial Club, Albury NSW  
*When:* 9 am to 12.30 pm

Steve Whitaker      David Kennedy  
Gerard Ryan        Michael McCormack  
Tim Jessep         Diane Jepson

"This six speaker program represents a great opportunity for cattle producers and their livestock agents to update themselves on Bovine Johnes Disease, BJD Zoning and strategies available to local cattlemen to limit the risks of BJD infection within local cattle herds."

*Cost:*      *Members*                      \$15 (GST inclusive)  
                 *Non-Members*                \$25 (GST inclusive)

*RSVP:*      (by Tuesday 13th Feb please)  
                 Brian Cumming (wk ph (02) 6041 6500)

**BJD  
Seminar**

## The Whiteface Advantage

After 6 years of benchmarking with consultants, Holmes & Sackett, we at Wirruna do not believe that one form of British breed offers better profitability than the other, there is a range of good to bad genetics in each breed. The key is management. Setting up your herd structure, appropriate culling strategies and selecting efficient genetics will assist lower your cost of production, which is the major driver of profit. This implies that breeding females must be able to efficiently forage, milk sufficiently and return to service readily.

Where other breeds have a perceived advantage in certain traits, like Angus cattle and marbling, the Hereford benefits in growth rates, feed efficiency, fertility and docility. Under the right management regime, their ability to offer productivity at low cost per kg of beef outweighs premiums received on the \$'s received per kg of beef side of the profit equation (below).

$$\text{Profit} = \text{Product} \times \left( \frac{\text{Price}}{\text{Received}} - \frac{\text{Cost of}}{\text{Production}} \right)$$

$$\$/\text{Ha} = \text{kg}/\text{Ha} \times (\$/\text{kg})$$

Profit is not purely based on price you receive for your sale stock when they leave your front gate, eg. topping weaner sales is not a good indicator of overall beef herd profitability.

In the Northern Crossbreeding Project of the CRC work, Hereford sired calves were shown

to grow faster than the 9 other breeds trailed except Charolais. The average weight advantage over both Angus & Shorthorn sired calves was 19 kg at 18 months. The feed efficiency data for Herefords is also expected to be promising.

Given poor beef enterprise profitability, instead of culling the breed, start with the current management! And note that crossbreeding systems require a higher level of management than purebred enterprises.

### Wirruna Benchmarking Service

We see benchmarking as a vital management tool for every professionally run farming and grazing business. It identifies the financial strengths and weaknesses in your business and helps you focus on the factors that most influence your profit.

Wirruna are launching a Benchmarking service for Wirruna clients in the 2000/01 year. We will sponsor the cost of the analysis but take no part in the collection of data or reporting which is done for us by consultants Holmes, Sackett and Associates from Wagga Wagga.

Clients interested in this service or require further information should contact Ian Locke Phone (02) 6036 2877

*"Grassfed bulls last, on average twice as long as grainfed bulls"*

*Dr Mike Blockey*





## Offer to Spring Calving Herds

In 1997-98 we shifted the Wirruna herd to spring calving only. This change has simplified our management and allowed us to significantly increase stocking rates and stop seasonal supplementary feeding.

However, for clients with spring calving herds, this adjustment results in bulls coming available well before they are required.

As a service to past buyers of our Spring Bulls and to encourage you to continue to support our bull sales, we offer you payment and delivery arrangements that may assist your program.

Our offer is for any bull/s purchased at our Helmsman sale you may:

*25% down-payment*

Pay **25% of the purchase price up front,**

and

*75% at delivery*

Pay the further **75% of the purchase price upon delivery before your next Spring joining.**

We look after your bulls for 6 months or so and cover insurance while they are at "Spring Valley". We will then arrange delivery at a time that suits you.

### No more F1 Bulls

Since 1995 we offered F1 Charolais/Poll Hereford X Bulls as a terminal sires specifically designed for people to use over mature, lesser performing, British breed cows.

We found it difficult to market these bulls effectively and it became hard to justify taking up a productive year of a good Poll Hereford female for the 25% chance of obtaining a good F1 bull calf.

It is with some regret that this is the case, because we and many buyers of F1 Bulls felt they were a good product. Nevertheless, we believe those clients will find that the market for F1 and composite type bulls is better serviced now than it was 5 years ago.

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Please send me a bull sale catalogue:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone No. ( ) \_\_\_\_\_

Fax No. ( ) \_\_\_\_\_