

An Aussie Perspective

Since last month's article I have again visited a very diverse range of places. I commenced this month by travelling from California to Fallon Nevada where I was hosted by Gary and Pegi Witte. The Fallon area contains some very unique Shorthorn herds. The Witte, Albaugh and Barnes herds are all registered as Native Shorthorns. The Native Shorthorn is registered with both the ASA and the milking association and can be traced back in the herdbook to have no outside influence from other breeds. They are typical of Shorthorns I hear about from the past. They are moderate easy keeping cattle. In a very dry environment selection pressure on survivability is high.



I then travelled back to California to visit Bigelow, Cardey and Bennett Shorthorns. Bigelow Livestock have 100 females. Their herd is very consistent, moderate and functional, definitely a herd to keep an eye on in the future. Bigelow Livestock are gradually developing themselves a commercial bull market which I believe is the only direction available to further grow the Shorthorn breed in America. I personally can't envisage the show heifer market growing significantly but I can see huge potential to increase the volume of Shorthorn bulls into commercial herds.

Cardey Shorthorns is a very well established herd that has a huge emphasis on feet and legs. A particularly interesting component of this enterprise is the huge teams of cattle taken to shows. It is not unusual for the Cardeys to take over 100 head to a show. I think Cardey genetics could be used very successfully by herds trying to improve structural correctness. I then continued to Bennett Shorthorns located in the southern foothills. I had an interesting discussion with Mike Bennett about the potential to combine feeder steers from different small Shorthorn producers into a group to allow for a large group of Shorthorns that then may facilitate the sale of these cattle over the hooks. This sale method will do two things. It will avoid the sale barn system through which Shorthorns

often receive a price penalty purely due to hair colour and it will also remind the meat processors that Shorthorns have a highly desirable carcass. The difficulty with this approach however would be getting a consistent group that grade well, as many Shorthorn breeders have quite different directions.

The final day I was in California the temperature had reached a beautiful 90oF (32oC). The next day I flew to Chicago where I was greeted by Aaron Hahn and a much cooler temperature. He delivered me to Horton Shorthorns.

Like the vast majority of Shorthorn breeders in America, Shorthorns are not the Hortons only business. However they have implemented some very interesting strategies to market the beef they have. They have established a relationship with a local restaurant that offers Horton beef in burgers as a seasonal menu item. This ensures the product is seen as unique and interesting to consumers but also allows a small herd with seasonal calving to maintain a vertically integrated market.

Since I have been in the USA I have come across many breeders that sell freezer beef and have a small but loyal cliental. Often it is argued that a major disadvantage of beef over chicken and pork is a less consistent product. Many systems have been established to try and remedy this issue, with varying success. I think within a brand consistency is essential. However within the entire beef industry I think variation in beef eating characteristics is a massive strength that the industry can utilise more. Consumers want to enjoy eating, try new foods, and be able to share with their friends positive dining experiences they have. Just look at all the photos of food on social media. The wine industry utilises variation in production better than most. They use it to make wine interesting but also a



Hayden Morrow | Australian Shorthorn Ambassador

topic of discussion and debate. Marbling for example. Many consider it to be very desirable. I personally really enjoy a well marbled steak. However I'm not sure every consumer wants the same amount of intramuscular fat that I do. Some may want more, some less. I think variability makes beef interesting and thus there is a lot of potential to grow freezer beef and branding of products. Provided there is consistency within each brand as a consumer wants to know what to expect from each product.

While in Illinois I also visited Hahn Family Shorthorns. This is definitely a family operation with each member having their own set of skills and experiences to for fill their role within the enterprise. This breeding program is trying to push for greater efficiency in their herd. The use of Ash Valley Prestige 0665 to reduce birth weight but maintain growth is a clear example. I have often discussed with people on this trip the most efficient way to select for calving ease. It is a huge problem in many herds particularly those with a show ring focus. It is my belief that a moderate birthweight that is well shaped to facilitate passage though the pelvic canal is ideal. I think using extremely low birthweight bulls will increase calving problems. This is because very low birthweights will reduce selection pressure on the heifers and cows to have adequate pelvic diameter to calve. Thus offspring of low birth weight cattle will only be able to have very small calves. Hahn Family Shorthorns have a similar philosophy and actually measure pelvic diameter on all females.

Waukaru Shorthorns in Indiana was my next destination. The Jordan's herd has a reputation for power and growth. Many Waukaru sires have been very successful in Australia for this reason. I was really pleased to see that the Waukaru herd also ensures calving ease is maintained. I was at Waukaru during the peak of calving season where all the cows are expected to be able to calve by



them self. It's a challenging time of the year when the frozen ground is melting and mother nature hasn't quite decided if it's winter or spring. Temperatures fluctuated while I was at Waukaru from pleasant days to windy snowy days with temperatures well below freezing. Rensselaer Indiana is incredibly productive ground and as a result the vast majority of land is corn or soybeans, there are very few



commercial cattle. This means that Waukaru as a seedstock breeder must sell the majority of their bulls interstate. Thus I think it's a real testament to the quality of the Waukaru herd, as the clients must see there genetics to be superior enough to be worth transporting across the country. Waukaru is definitely one of the breeders carrying the commercial flag for the Shorthorn breed.

While at Waukaru I was also fortunate enough to visit Donor Solutions. The first day I was there I

was able to watch conventional embryo transfer by Dr. Chuck Hannan and have some practice palpating and scanning ovaries. Donor Solutions is also a satellite clinic for Trans Ova so I was able to observe the IVF of 19 cows including one terminal. The program I'm on truly does provide some amazing opportunities.

Thank you again to all of my hosts over the last month, particularly the Jordan's as they looked after me for two weeks. I'm almost half way through my time in America and am loving every moment.

Hayden Morrow
Australian Shorthorn Ambassador 