

An Aussie Perspective

An Aussie perspective continued...

Well what an incredible adventure I am having. At the time of writing this article I have visited 20 states. Since my last article I have again seen too many things to mention. I left Waukaru and headed to Cates Farms for a few days around Easter.

Thank you to the Cates Family for making me feel welcome during the Easter period, which is obviously a time that family are in our thoughts. The mid-west continued to redefine what I thought a muddy yard is. The Cates are a family that raises show cattle for a living, which is no doubt a challenging feat to achieve. For such a high input beef cattle operation to be economically viable the sale animals must be consistently successful in the show ring. And there is no doubt that the Cates Family are able to achieve this. Success takes a lot of dedication and hard work.

My next destination was Bowman Superior Genetics (BSG). The Bowmans have a strong focus on producing commercially focused practical cattle. Data recording is a key part of BSGs breeding program. When seeking a new herd sire, commercial producers use data to make their selection decisions. Thus consistent long term data measurement is essential to create numbers with high enough accuracies to be useful for producers. BSGs sire battery is impressive and includes Saskvalley Stampede, Saskvalley Taskforce, Mapelton Colonel Gus and the recent addition of Muridale Thermal Energy. This group of bulls provides a great balance between performance and practicality the essential requirements for commercial production. A solid group of replacement females present shows that BSGs future is bright. Also thanks for the Mexican restaurant birthday experience Luke (wasn't even my birthday).

I then made a quick trip to JT Mooreland Shorthorns. This is a herd that puts great emphasises on "convenience traits". Selection for calving ease is forefront. It was only a quick visit to JT Mooreland but it was clear lower input cattle were sought after. Interestingly like many other breeders some crossbred bulls are bred to try and attract commercial cattlemen to try some shorthorn genetics. It is

currently quite a challenge to prove to commercial cattlemen that some Shorthorns are very profitable cattle and not all are strictly show ring performers. Another advantage of this is that greater data links can be created with other breeds that are included in the multi-breed EPD's available.

Luke Bowman then took me on a tour of Select Sires in Ohio. It is quite incredible to see 1,900 bulls all individually stalled and managed to optimise semen collection for a range of domestic and international markets, in both the beef and dairy industry's. A thorough tour allowed me to visit everything from the bull pens right up to the processing and shipping of semen. The G erfens then picked me up from Select Sires. The G erfens are new to Shorthorn breeding but have managed to acquire a good group of cows and sire JSF Capiche. What I really enjoyed was getting to spend some time in their commercial farrow to finish pig farm. It's an experience that people don't often get due to the biosecurity challenges of intensive animal production.

The efficiency of production in the pork industry is astounding. An interesting difference with the beef industry is that there is much less debate on how much selection emphasises should be placed on each trait. It's clear that the ability to control the environment and nutrition makes this possible and is a key reason for why pork is often a more consistent product than beef. Luke Bowman brought up an interesting point that the beef industry is unique from other livestock industries in that you can "do what ever the hell you want". This statement refers to genetic selection. I'm sure many would agree there is a huge diversity of opinions and selection remains quite subjective. Objective measurement is essential to ensure selection decisions are consistently seeking the same direction. If a consistent direction is not pursued then progress is inevitably hampered.

My next host was the Miller Family at Paint Valley Shorthorns in Ohio. The Millers are located in an area in which there is a very high



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concentration of Amish people. I was able to go to an Amish horse auction which was packed to the rafters with buyers that all had their horse drawn buggies outside. I met several Amish people and had dinner at an Amish restaurant called Mrs Yodas. It was interesting to get some insight into the Amish culture which to the uninitiated is really difficult to understand. There are many things I still cannot understand but there is no doubt they are very industrious people as manufacturing industry thrived in the district. Paint Valley Shorthorns is an operation that aims to sell bulls to commercial clients. It is currently very challenging for a USA Shorthorn breeder to enter this market particularly in the mid-west where the show industry is so strong. Paint Valley though is defiantly a herd that is showing initiative to push for a greater commercial bull market.



The following week I spent at Byland with the Byers. As Jeff is a vet I really enjoyed following him around on calls. I was able to visit a range of dairy's and beef producers in the area. I have found the dairy industry in the US very interesting because of its differences from the predominantly pasture based systems in Australia. I have been able to see a range of designs including a robotic dairy. There is considerable capital investment required but successfully reduces labour requirement. Large modern dairies are generally all very good at data recording and monitoring. The implementation of technologies to monitor performance and identify areas that require improvement is generally much greater than the beef industry. Regular vet herd visits and discussions with advisors to optimise production and profit are essential. While at one dairy I was able to trial a new app that was designed to identify components of the production system that could be improved to promote discussion. The app simply

asked questions which essentially resulted in benchmarking the enterprise with the gold standard according to latest research. Innovations like this may seem small but are essential steps to facilitate progression. Byland Shorthorns are a well-known herd that has had some influence in Australia with sires such as Byland Mission. It was clear that there were some very high quality cattle present.

I was also fortunate enough to here Temple Grandin speak while with the Byers. Unfortunately the talk did not offer much detail into her work with the livestock industry but she did highlight an issue in the beef industry. She stated that her new obsession is lameness in the beef cattle industry. There is no doubt this is an issue that can be and needs to be improved upon.

My next host was Tom and Susie Turner. The Turners have a highly muscled herd and target the steer show market. They have a beautiful property that was really enjoyable to visit. Once a Silica mine the site has many exposed rock faces that makes it very unique. The Turners took me for a tour of Ohio State Animal Science and Veterinary Science schools. I was really impressed by the facilities, from the huge football stadium to

all the specialist capabilities of the veterinary school. While at the Vet school surgery on a Tiger was taking place. Another one of those things I never could have anticipated seeing but seems to happen most days on this trip. It's amazing how many unique things I have been able to see.

My next destination was North Dakota. It was the longest drive I've been on so far throughout the trip. Joe Donnelly picked me up with a trailer load of cattle and we travelled 17 hours to Jungels. On the way we stopped to see Lake Michigan. The volume of fresh water in the great lakes is so hard for me to get my head around, it's another incredible sight. I spent two weeks in North Dakota predominantly at Jungels but also made visits to NDSU and Galbreaths. Jungels is a herd that has gained a significant commercial reputation. They are moderate easy doing cattle that are sound and fertile. Throughout my trip I have been seeing Jungels genetics all over the country so it was good to finally arrive in North Dakota to see



the herd. While I was there it was time to put cows and calves out on pasture. Inevitably there were a couple of hectic days. Drafting and processing a few hundred cows and calves to be hauled 12 different ways to pasture takes some time, but it was good to be busy.

The commercial focus of Derek Jungels breeding program is obvious. The breeding of blue roan cattle is a good example of this. Blue roans are used to increase market acceptance but still make it clear there is Shorthorn in the bulls pedigree when he stands in the commercial mans pasture. Jungels also purchase heifers back from their commercial clients, breed them and sell them privately. It facilitates the sale of a larger volume of commercial females with Jungels genetics. I think initiatives like these are critical to gain a good commercial reputation. Particularly as it facilitates volume which is essential in this market as the average commercial buyers want good value cattle which requires scale to achieve while remaining profitable.

I also met Ryan Galbreath and toured the nearby Galbreath Farms. This herd aims to sell commercial bulls. Some older genetics is also incorporated into the program to help maintain moderation, doability and calving ease. Sire DMH Cherry Fillet is a good example of this, his sire Weston Trademark was born in 1967. I find it very interesting that over time the type of animal desirable in the beef industry has shifted so much. These changes are market driven as the industry is just meeting specifications that equate to the most profit. But what causes such drastic shifts in which types are most desirable?

I then was briefly at the Pearsons in Sioux Falls followed by Schrag Shorthorns in South Dakota. While at Schrags I made a visit to Trans Ova's Sioux Centre facility. It truly is incredible how far reproductive and genetic technology has come. The facilities ability to create clones and transgenic animals is pretty incredible. There is no doubt that the potential efficiency gains in livestock production via this route is exciting. However it will also be a challenge to decide as a global community how far is too far. It is defiantly an ethical debate which factors in finding a balance between producing food efficiently enough to



feed the world with the resources we have but also our moral compass with reference to manipulating natures processes. One concern I have is that as genetic technologies progress into the future our selection capability will improve and thus more efficient animals will be isolated and then propagated. Inevitably reducing genetic variation within the bovine species. To quote Charles Darwin *"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is most adaptable to change"*. Obviously genetic variation is the key to a species adaptability to change. The

simultaneous increase in intensification of production system and narrowing of the gene pool will result in enhanced susceptibility to disease. There is no doubt that efficiency of production must increase to feed the world, but I think a large amount of this production increase will come from improvements of nutrition and management on a global scale.

I was then at Omaha with Gwen and the two new interns Victoria and Will. After hearing all the classic jokes like "throw a shrimp on the barbie" (heard that one a few times) and perfecting eating with chop sticks at a Kobe restaurant (thanks Victoria). We followed tradition and visited Aussies Pub in Omaha. I then finally made it to the American Shorthorn Association office for a day. From here Patrick Wall an extension officer from Iowa State picked me up. While with Patrick I was able to participate in some extension programs, one that was designed for veterinarians in the local area to update them on the latest research. There was a series of interesting presentations. One of them focussed on the potential to dry lot cows all year round. As cattle prices are at record highs and many producers are trying to increase their herd size this inevitably means a greater number of people are competing for available pasture. Large amounts of pasture in the mid-west has been converted to farmland, thus it is increasingly difficult to find pasture. Currently it is very feasible to run breeding cows in a dry lot all year. Inevitably there will be different challenges with this production system including both disease and welfare. Nonetheless it is an interesting concept that will be driven by economic viability.

I then made a brief visit to Bert Moore's. It was very interesting seeing his "tie out lounge" which is filled with

Shorthorn history. I think a key piece of information you can obtain from looking at Shorthorn history is that they were once a dominate breed. There is defiantly potential to increase market share and rival Angus if the right selection goals are put in place across the breed. Genetic variation is required to allow genetic selection to progress a population. Thus a larger population with similar selection goals will inevitably have greater progress. As a result consistent breeding objectives between producers is essential, particularly with a large number of small herds. There is no doubt on my

travels I have seen a huge amount of diversity in breeding direction. Bert then took me to Studers to tour the herd with Dale for a day. I was impressed by the herds focus on commercial profitability. They have been using some Canadian genetics in recent times, which have kept the cows easy keeping and functional.



I then met up with Gwen and the interns again to travel to Kansas City and watch the Royals beat the Cardinals with a sold out crowd. I sampled some more food including a funnel cake. I have to admit the American food is starting to make me crave fruit and vegetables. But I am also aware I get a particularly unhealthy food experience because I'm constantly travelling.

Thank you again to all of my hosts. I'm having an amazing time and I'm still surprised constantly about the things I have been able to see and do. □