

# RED POLLS

## in the 21st Century

Beef report by Ben Simpson



A Red Poll herd sire in S.A.

I have had the pleasure of visiting and meeting a range of stud and commercial Red Poll breeders from South Australia and Victoria this spring. In my roll as a marketing consultant for your breed, I have investigated the benefits and the adaptability of Red Polls in different areas and as a result have been sent to many interesting places in the south of the country (next year I plan to visit a variety of breeders in Northern NSW and QLD).

I have been impressed with the wide range of climatic and environmental conditions that Red Polls can survive in. When we take a look at what the future holds for us, I believe that breeders who embrace the use of modern technologies to help them select and monitor, can provide a strong genetic case for commercial breeders in the future.

Since the advent of Estimated Breeding Values (EBV's) and other



Red Poll Hereford Cross make excellent red baldies.

selection tools in beef production, we have seen a rapid rate of change in our industry. Feedlots and processors have requested we deliver carcasses that have increased size, less fat, and more muscle, combined with high eating quality and being visually attractive to consumers.

Most progressive and profitable producers have endeavored to meet these goals and in effect, have been pushing these boundaries of genetic selection for 20 odd years. Figures from MLA 2006 suggest that we have been successful.

We have 2.6% of the world's cattle population yet produce 4% of the world's beef supply. We produce just over 2 million tonnes of beef and veal annually worth approx. \$7.4 billion (ABARE 2005-06) and export around 65 % of this to over 100 countries, making Australia the 2nd largest exporter of beef

in the world, worth approximately \$4.5 billion annually (ABS).

An impressive set of figures considering we are one of the driest countries on earth. Additionally, we have achieved these goals with little government assistance and have had to endure many seasonal hardships. How then can Red Polls be of benefit to producers in the next 20 years?

What steps do we need to take to ensure we are still producing profitably in the future when considering climate, grain prices and ethanol production, just to name a few? This could be one of the greatest challenges in agriculture in the last 100 years.

As we look to the future of beef production, we need to assess the genetic gain we have already achieved and ask ourselves have we bred the type of animal that can withstand the climatic and economic demands of the future?

As Red Poll breeders you certainly have more tools to evaluate, measure and assess than you have ever had and it will be how we use these tools for a predicted future that is the key to success for the future.

In the last 5 years there has been a massive adjustment in the feedlot industry. The current drought, combined with the world-wide demand for ethanol production, has meant grain demand has risen to all time highs with

variable price rises and falls.

In my opinion the long fed (200 day plus) may not be sustainable with the future demand on grain prices combined with a changing climate. These conditions could see an increase in the demand for shorter fed and grass fed product, which could mean a change in genetic selection for some producers.

The present seasonal conditions suggest that producers should again increase their selection pressure for females who can efficiently reproduce annually with minimal cost of production whilst still producing an end product that will be able to suit the market requirements of the future.

The future, in my opinion, will see our traditional measures of growth and carcass quality, through EBV's, genetic markers etc, weighted against the sustainability of production.

It will be the commercial and biological mechanisms combined with genetic selection for fertility, growth and carcass traits and understanding how they interact with the nutritional regime and the environment, that will be the key to mapping out our future as beef producers.

It is this interaction of environment, genetics and market specifications that will ensure that Red Polls are still producing beef in 20 years. ❖



A Red Poll - Ayrshire cross cow with Red Poll calf.