



## Ardrossan Studs' 22 years of Producing Lowline Beef

Presented by Jeanette and Peter Stebbins at the SRPG's 2013 AGM



Our main aim, when we purchased our first Lowlines, was to see the Breed established as a recognized beef breed and also to provide a consistent supply of smaller cuts of good quality beef. We now feel satisfied that we have met those criteria.

A problem we struck with our own clients in the early days was that a lot thought their male calves were all bull material or future Royal Show champions.

As we all know, not all calves should be kept as breeding stock for various reasons, such as conformation, temperament, etc.

To encourage breeders to castrate their males to try and form a Lowline beef market, we purchased a castrator that was easy for everyone to use. We hired it to breeders and even offered to castrate bull calves for clients ourselves, as part of our service.

Properly produced and marketed, Lowline steers and cull heifers will provide a valuable profit centre for your cattle operation. In order to maximize the value of your beef, you should follow some important guidelines.

## LOWLINE BREEDING STOCK

For those breeders who are serious about marketing and supplying Lowline beef in an ongoing way, I suggest their first move is to know what they are trying to market.

**ASK “Who has eaten their own Lowline beef?”**

**Who has sold their Lowline beef to others?**

**Who knows what they are breeding, i.e. fat cover, eye muscle area, etc? And are you consistent?”**

Choose your breeding stock carefully. When purchasing a bull, the breeder should be able to advise you of traits such as s birth weight, mature weight, scrotal size, hip height and length. Bonus traits are eye muscle area and fat cover. Such information will give you an idea of where the bull can improve your herd to produce the best carcasses.

On top of this we have found that two most important aspects of improving our carcasses are

1. to keep detailed records of your animals, i.e. birth date, sire and dam are the starting point, together with weight increases.
2. This then brings into play the second most important too and that is scales, after all how can you gauge the improvement of an animal and be able to recognize when it has reached its finishing weight without the use of scales. This will enable you to supply at a consistent weight and as required by your customers whether they are butchers, restaurants or the public. You will gain repeat customers if you are able to produce a good product time after time.

Once the animal is grown out, Carcase competitions and visiting the abattoir are invaluable tools to finding out exactly what the initial mating or genetics has produced. Carcase competitions show you such things as if the animal has laid down too much or not enough fat, the size of the Eye Muscle Area (EMA), colour of the meat, etc, because things such as the colour of the meat can indicate if the meat is dark though stress, which would then eat tough. If you are finishing on grass with supplementary grain, this can be done through Summer, Autumn or Spring, when less grain is needed over a shorter period of time than in Winter. If you are totally reliant on grass finishing, the months you finish your stock are very important – they won’t finish on grass in a cold Winter.



## FIND A PROCESSING FACILITY

1. When you have got your animal up to a finished state, it is important to find a processor to slaughter and a butcher to cut and wrap your products to your requirements.
2. The other thing to keep in mind is when you are finishing off steers, to a date or weight you will need to ensure that the butcher and abattoir are available at this time as well.
3. There are some important facts when choosing a butcher which include –
  - How long can they hang the carcase to age the beef?

### **The two biggest factors in aging beef are:**

- Size (weight)

Basically it breaks down like this ... The bigger the carcase is (providing there is enough fat cover) the longer it is able to age. A 400kg (hanging weight) carcase is going to be able to age longer than a 250 kg carcase.

- Fat cover.

Fat cover means the amount of fat that is covering the outside of the carcase. The fatter the carcase, the longer it is able to age. A lean bull carcase is only going to be able to age 5-10 days, as it will dry out, where a finished, well fattened steer can go 14-21 days.

Some other contributing factors can be

### **How full the butcher's cool room is:**

Bacteria are what break down the muscle structure (aging). In a full cool room the bacteria is able to easily "jump" from carcase to carcase. Being able to "jump" on a fresh carcase jumpstarts the aging process and makes it so the animal doesn't need to hang as long.

Also if a butcher's cool room is full he may not have the room to age your animal. Cool rooms are very expensive to run and keeping your animal more than 14 days costs the butcher money. Your animal is taking up room that another animal could be in.

### **What temperature the meat cool room is kept at:**

The majority of cool rooms are kept between 1 - 4 degrees. The lower the temperature the slower the bacteria work. A cool room kept at 4c **WILL** age faster than one kept at 1c. Frequent visits to the cool room also alter the consistency of the temperature.

## DEVELOP YOUR MARKET

With developing your markets I will concentrate on what we do on our farm. Our main market is selling sides of beef which we supply to our clients bagged and ready to go into the freezer. To do this we supply them with an order form showing the different cuts available, together with portion sizes in each bag.

Customers also have the option of cryovaccing the beef which lasts on the fridge shelf a lot longer as well as continues to age the beef. Our order form is altered according to the season – Winter- more casserole type cuts and Summer more steaks.

As an added service we deliver to the door and also supply a recipe booklet produced by MLA seasonally. We also encourage feedback from our customers, good or bad, to enable us to improve our service.

To locate customers we do the following:-

- We have an “A” board out the front of the farm advertising our beef.
- Donate a tray of meat for a raffle to local groups like the Young Farmers Group.
- Word of mouth to any groups we are involved in.
- Letting friends, relatives, know of our product.
- Web page
- Notices placed in local businesses such as the general store, etc.
- Advertising in Community papers – try to get editorial as well
- Always have brochures and/or business cards on hand.

Most of these options are free.

**Other areas of marketing are:-**

1. In general, selling direct to restaurants is difficult for a small beef producer. Many restaurants require a steady supply of specific cuts of beef. A small producer may be unable to produce enough of one cut and may find themselves oversupplied with other cuts. To overcome this, breeders might be able to group together to be able to produce the amounts required. Another alternative is to approach the restaurant or café and suggest they run a monthly/blackboard special in the month/s that you will have suitable beef available.
2. If there is a Farmers Market in your area, this will give you an opportunity to meet customers and produce packaging to suit their needs. Have tastings available.
3. Small goods can make extra profit from your secondary cuts. One breeder used the whole animal to produce secret recipe chorizo sausages, which were sold at markets, shows and fetes for \$6.00 each and had no trouble selling them.

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