



The Long Black

New Zealand Lowline Breeders Newsletter No.3 October 2025

Welcome back. We hope everyone has survived calving in good shape and the spring growth has arrived.

And the big winds haven't done too much damage to your property.

This time our interview is with the Clees, David and Christina, of Rancho Radiata.

In this edition we have focused on the end product of our Lowlines: juicy, flavourful, marbled beef. We test your knowledge of where the best cuts come from on the animal and share some of the tips Kay uses with young stock judges getting started in the show ring.

The ALCA AGM is coming up on November 22 in Wagga Wagga. We encourage members to take part in that meeting by Zoom or proxy vote. Proxies close on November 19 with the Genetic Hub office. The vote for councillors has been emailed to members as there are six nominations for the four vacancies. Voting closes on November 19. It's important that all members have their say on the special resolutions proposed by the existing council, and to vote for the vacant council positions. Your input matters as ALCA members. Look out for communications from Genetics Hub. If you think you're missing emails check in with Matt Wilkinson who is helping to make sure NZ members are getting the communications.

Any questions or suggestions please contact our editor, Michelle, at michelle@ironcladstud.nz

INTERVIEW:

David Clee's instincts are on the money as the Treasurer for NZ Lowline Breeders. And his and wife Christina's investment in Lowlines has repaid them over the years in the paddock and on the plate.

David and Christina began farming in 1995, when they bought a small, uneconomical farm with the intention of planting 50 hectares in pine trees, leaving 10 hectares of grazing which they used for sheep.

Hence the name of their stud, Rancho Radiata.

Cattle were used amongst the trees once they were three or four years old to keep the fire risk down.

"This led on to a keen interest in cattle and one day a heifer had a calf unexpectedly and that's when we got keen on cows with calves," David says.

"We knew Robert Baird of Tartan Farms from meeting him at A&P shows and thought Lowlines were an interesting breed. Then we met him again at a millennium party and, before the night was over, we found ourselves in the Lowline business."





Qtie at 2 yrs, now 6 and feeding the best heifer calf seen in years.

This meant another farm was purchased in Ahuroa, west of Warkworth.

“We started out with 30 hectares of good grazing and the Lowline breeding dream was born and has been playing out since. Recently we acknowledged the need for a more manageable farm and we sold approximately 14h to Nico and Neilla Schroeder, now fellow lowline breeders as Baumeister Stud.”

The Clees’ breeding programme has contributed to other members’ herds.

“In 2020 Matt and Tania Wilkinson (Lowland Park) bought our breeding herd to allow us to downsize. We now run 10 breeding cows on approximately 16 hectares with a few white faces to keep the grass manageable.

“We don’t live on the farm so we have set up cameras to check stock and water tank levels allowing us to no longer travel twice a day to check pregnant cows at calving time or to stay at home dry on wet days.

“We have a wonderful working relationship with Nico, our neighbour. He helps oversee the property when we can’t. He takes on maintenance jobs beyond my ability and we share two bulls between the two Lowline studs and merge the herds at mating time.

“Our aim for Lowlines has always been to grow them big enough for the beef industry. We wanted a two-year heifer to be able to reach the 180kg carcass weight requirements for the works.

“Sally Yearbury (Ploughbright) was a big influence for us with this aim. We have always wanted Lowlines to be a viable beef breed.

“We plan on breeding for some time yet. As long as I can walk around the farm we will enjoy this fabulous breed for a lot longer yet.

“We have always believed that the breeders group, no matter what name it runs under, is fundamental to all breeders, and working as a group seems to have advantages and provide support for breeders to carry on with their vision.”

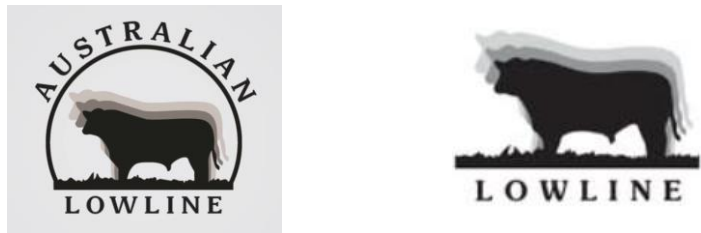
David is adamant that “Steak must be cooked as rare as can be. My mother was a terrible cook, bless her. She used to boil the veges till they were dead and grey, and cook meat till it was dry. I was taken to a posh restaurant in Vancouver in my 20s by a friend for a birthday meal and was introduced to blue rare steak and realised the crimes my mother had committed against humanity.”



The ultimate proof.

ALCA matters:

Breed brand: The current ALCA council is trademarking a new association logo which includes the word Australian.



The why for the change they say is:

“The breed is not just Lowline – it is Australian Lowline. Including “Australian” helps eliminate confusion and ensures we are properly recognised for what we are: a proudly Australian-developed breed with a unique and important story.

Adding “Australian” increases clarity, pride, and appeal particularly in marketing contexts.

According to industry research, products and breeds branded with the word “Australian” are up to 26% more trusted and positively received by consumers both locally and overseas. This small addition boosts the credibility and appeal of the breed in the marketplace for both Australian & International Members.” (To that I say, “Maate, ya haven’t been to New Zealand, have ya? 😄 Seriously, some of my best friends are Australian.)

The intention is to redo all the promotional material and banners with this logo. The logo looks smart but I do believe they should have consulted members about such a change in branding, and I’m hoping our well-known, original three bulls Lowline logo will be retained for use by members also. The breed is officially Australian Lowline but I tend to promote them in Enzed as Lowline. - Kay

Genetic Hub: ALCA has engaged Genetic Hub, based in Wagga Wagga, to deliver member and registration services on behalf of the association. This began on September 1.

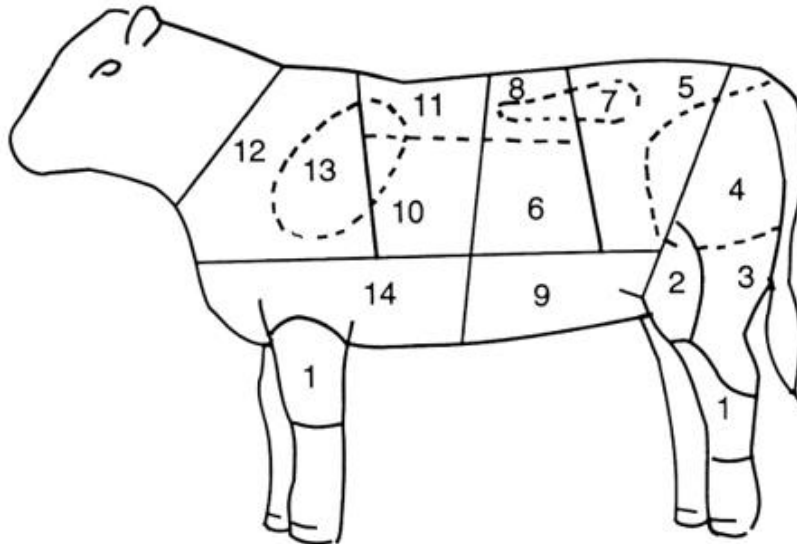
Genetic Hub’s info says it developed in collaboration with leading breed societies, and serves as a centralised platform for managing pedigrees, performance records, DNA processing, and genomic data. Genetic Hub will also provide membership support and back-office. Members are encouraged to contact Genetic Hub directly for all matters related to registrations, performance data, and general association inquiries.

Genetic Hub CEO: Kate Brabin. Contact email communications@genetichub.com.au
When you are dealing with registrations etc you will be dealing with any one of a team of registrars. There have been a few teething issues with communications. Matt W has been assisting with ensuring NZ members get email information about changes, the AGM and voting.

Can you place the list of beef cuts on the animal?

Blade, Brisket, Chuck, Fillet, Ribs, Rib eye, Round, Rump, Shin, Silverside, Sirloin, Topside, T-Bone, Thin Flank.

Answers later in newsletter.



Source: Beef Cattle Production by Lucy Newham

Cooking your steak

- **Blue** steak is cooked from cold, over a very high temperature for a short time. It should be almost entirely raw on the inside, with light char on the outside.



- **Rare** steak is cooked more than blue, but should still be red on the inside. It should be browned all over but soft to the touch, with an internal temperature of 49° to 55° C.

- **Medium-rare** is the most commonly requested doneness. It should be tender and pink inside, with only a small amount of red. The internal temperature should be 55° to 57° C.

- **Medium** steak should have a thick band of pink meat through the middle, with an internal temperature of 60° to 66° C.

- **Medium-well** steak should only have a hint of pink through the centre. Its internal temperature should be 68° to 74° C.

- **Well-done** steak can easily be mistaken for overcooked steak.

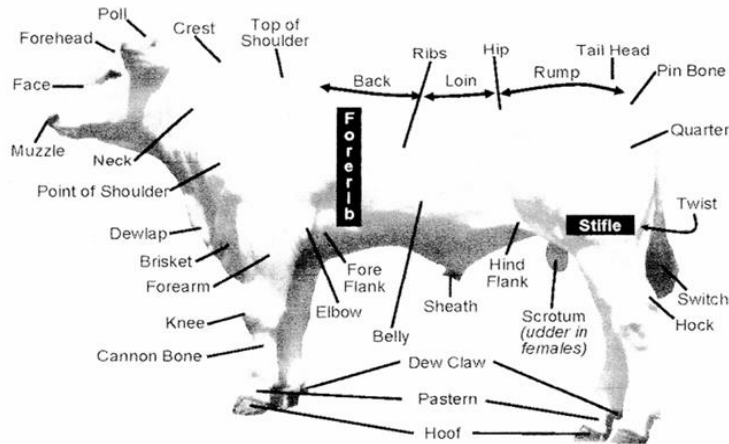
A good well-done steak should be cooked through, while still being moist, with an internal temperature of 77° C.



Pictures and info courtesy of New World supermarket. They have an excellent rundown on their website of all the beef cuts and how to cook them. <https://www.newworld.co.nz/discover/best-cuts-of-beef>

Basic stock judging tips for young judges

Beef Cattle Parts



Key parts to learn for stock judging

We assess the animal on key parts that are essential to its growing and breeding.

Muzzle – The animal has to be able to feed itself. Wide muzzle. No undershot or overshot jaw.

Eye – A kind eye is good. You don't want it looking scared like a frog with bulging eyes. Hooded - good eyelid to protect the eye from sun and in bush country.

Back (also known as Topline) – Good straight back means the animal is well balanced and can move about well. Stands squarely on all four legs.

Hooves and Pasterns – The animal needs to stand well, not slumping back on its hooves and pasterns. When it walks does it have an even stride? When it walks the back leg should land roughly where the front leg on that side left. An even stride means the animal is well balanced and will be able to move around to find feed.

Brisket – This will fill up as the animal puts on condition but you don't want it bulging and too full of fat.

Pin Bone and Hip – The slope between these is a clue to whether the cow will calve easily.

Rump and Quarter – Needs to be meaty.

Males: Sheath – Nice and tidy, nothing dangling.

Females: Udder – Good even udder in all quarters (all teats).

(I use these as a basic starter for my high school cattle team training. – Kay)

Marketplace:

Alan Birt would like to advertise his Lowline herd for sale. The herd comprises nine mixed age cows, seven of which should be pregnant, plus one bull, Ironclad Tactician.

Contact: Alan Birt - CB Farms Rotorua carrconsult@xtra.co.nz

Book your prize: No one claimed the prize for contributions to Newsletter No.3 so – like Lotto – it jackpots to our next edition due out in February. All contributors will go in a draw for a copy of the Australian Lowline history. This beautiful book could be yours so get the camera out or sharpen your pen and send us your thoughts or pictures on anything Lowline, to michelle@ironcladstud.nz

The book, by Julie Knight and Sandra Price, is a look at the heritage and the history of Australian Lowlines, encompassing the arrival of the Glencarnock Angus in 1929, to the Trangie Research Station in New South Wales through to the Lowline cattle of today. This publication highlights the fantastic attributes these compact and versatile cattle have to offer to the small acreage farmer and commercial enterprise alike.



Genetic progress

*What genetic change has the New Zealand beef cow herd made and are we improving?
Amy Hoogenboom writes.*

Genetics set the potential for the upper and lower production limits an animal can achieve. Alongside animal health and nutrition, it is one of the most economically important production components of the modern beef system.

Genetic change is easy, one only has to look at the Angus New Zealand champion national sale bulls from the 1960s to the present day, to see that we can change the genetic make-up and 'type' of cattle we have.

The key is to make genetic improvement. Genetic improvement is about producing the best genotypes of cattle to suit a specific beef system, and importantly this genetic gain is cumulative and permanent.

So, what genetic change has the NZ beef cow herd made and are we improving?

Where we've come from and where we are now?

First, let's look at some general trends of the NZ beef cow herd from a breed composition aspect. Using information from Beef + Lamb NZ's Compendium of NZ Farm Facts (between 2010 and 2020) cattle numbers, breeding cows and heifers have remained relatively stable.

What has changed is the breed composition of the nation's cattle population, with the percentage of straight-bred Angus increasing by 10%. The percentage of Hereford and Angus/Hereford cross cattle have stayed similar. Mixed breed cattle dropped at a similar rate to that which Angus has increased.

The percentage of Friesian (in the form of bull beef) has reduced slightly but still hovers about 20% of NZ beef cattle numbers.

Another genetic trend, possibly overlooked, is the increasing number of polled cattle within the population. This is partly due to the change in breed composition towards a breed which is naturally polled. It is also through conscious effort by breeders to breed for the polled trait in their herd. Introducing the polled gene to a herd is one which rewards the farmer for decreased input costs in the form of reducing or removing the need for dehorning and improving the animal welfare aspects.

Focusing on the Angus and Hereford breeds, what way have the lines been trending for recorded traits of economic importance?

To find the answers I went searching for the two breed associations' trend graphs for the various estimated breeding value (EBV) traits reported. These were less readily available than hoped, but fortunately a couple of helpful breeders were willing to share their Breedplan reports. They include the breed average genetic trend Information from the early 2000s to present day. While we cannot directly compare EBV values between breeds due to the genetic base for each breed being different, the units the traits are expressed in are the same, therefore we can compare the rate of genetic gain between breeds.

Both breeds have increased growth from 2000 to 2020, with Angus having a slightly higher rate of gain (about 0.3kg/year) than the Hereford breed for 200- and 400-day weight EBV

average. The carcass weight EBV breed average has also lifted from 2000 to 2020 at a rate of 1.45kg per year for NZ Hereford and 1.15kg per year in NZ Angus cattle. As is well-documented, the high correlation of mature cow weight with growth and weight traits, means increase in growth has also resulted in an increase in mature cow weight EBVs at a rate of 0.95kg/year in Angus and 1.05kg/year in Herefords.

Premiums pushed marbling

Intra-muscular fat (IMF) was the big on-trend word for the 2021 bull selling season. This was off the back of announcements from some meat companies of better premiums for carcasses displaying higher eating quality attributes for which marbling was a key criterion.

Both breeds have made improvement to their IMF EBV breed averages, though Angus breeders have pursued both IMF and eye-muscle area more aggressively than Hereford breeders. The rate of genetic gain in the Angus breed being almost double that of Hereford for these two traits. Only very small changes to external fat cover EBV averages have been made in both breeds.

When we look at birth traits and traits of maternal importance, we have already mentioned the increased mature cow weight. Milk EBV breed averages for both breeds have also increased which, depending on the production system and environment in which the cows are run may not necessarily be desirable, especially when combined with an increased mature cow weight.

Birthweight for both breeds has, after trending upwards in the early 2000s, come back to the same, if not slightly less than where the breeds were at in 2001. This is most likely driven by a shift in some breeders' focus towards supplying bulls to the dairy market. The same can be said for gestation length and days to calving where downward pressure has been applied by breeders supplying the dairy industry, in turn reducing the breed average for each of these.

If we diverge from traits recorded for a moment, but to one of high maternal importance, the NZ national calving percentage (calculated as, the number of calves weaned, as a percentage of cows mated) has remained almost stagnant at ~82% over the past 30 years.

Varying factors on each farm impact this across the three production components of genetics, nutrition, and animal health, but there is considerable potential for increased reproductive performance and efficiency of the national beef herd to be made through something as 'simple' as increased calving percentage. Having the genetic potential for increased growth and carcass merit is of little value if you cannot get a calf on the ground in the first instance.

In summary, we've made good improvements in terminal traits which have led to higher weaning weights, yearling weights, and carcass weights. We've done a variable job on improving the traits that add value to the end product beyond carcass weight. However, we are probably falling short on improvement of key maternal traits that are becoming increasingly important with regards to more efficient production and a smaller environmental footprint.

Where are we going or where should we be heading?

One of the great challenges of the beef cattle industry is that the dollar benefit of these terminal trait improvements made by the bull buyer/cow-calf producer are very rarely seen

by them, unless they are a breeder-finisher which is of low occurrence in the NZ beef system. What the cow-calf producer does experience is the increased feed cost or maintenance associated with these bigger cattle.

To widen our profit margins, we cannot always count on increasing our income, but rather decreasing our inputs. Which raises the question: where is the sweet spot between maternal and terminal traits to realise a more efficient and profitable beef system across the whole chain?

Let's say you've bought an Angus bull to put over your 15-month heifers and he has a +2.0kg for BW and a CE direct of +5.0 %. For the past few years, you have not pulled calves from any heifers or are pulling less than 2%, do you need to keep driving those numbers up/down? When does it become detrimental to other parts of the operation?

If there are no on-farm issues with the related application of these traits you are using in your bull selection process, it is probably okay for you to keep buying at this threshold for these two traits, allowing for more selection on other traits where improvement is wanted. You can apply this same principle to other traits to help prioritise selection decisions.

If we wish to improve the efficiency of the beef cow herd population, undoubtedly some changes in the slope of these genetic trend lines are needed. Adding another 10kg to mature cow weight over the next 10 years will not improve efficiency of the beef system from any standpoint, most particularly at the cow-calf producer level where it is most needed, nor is it likely to stand the scrutiny of beef production's impact on the environment. What traits are we not recording for and giving adequate attention to that with small change could make significant improvement to the efficiency of beef production?

The modern beef cow herd needs to be a low-cost calf factory that produces an end product that meets market demand.



Amy Hoogenboom is a veterinarian and has been Zoetis NZ beef genetics area manager since 2021. She has spoken at What's the Beef roadshows and other beef-related promotions throughout the country, and has judged Lowlines, and other breeds, many times in the show ring. She lives in Canterbury. This article first appeared in CountryWide in May 2022.

- Answers to the beef cuts diagram:** 1. Shin 2. Round 3. Silverside
4. Topside 5. Rump 6. Sirloin 7. Fillet 8. T-Bone 9. Thin flank
10. Ribs 11. Rib eye
12. Chuck 13. Blade
14. Brisket

Points of a beef carcass

