



Trial to target NT market options



Tim Schatz, principal pastoral production research officer with the NT Department of Resources, Katherine.

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INCREASING marketing options for cattle from the Northern Territory beyond the live export trade is the impetus behind a crossbreeding project now under way at Katherine Research Station. Department of Resources staff have established a Senepol crossbreeding project to determine whether Senepol bulls can be used with Brahman cows to increase the marketing options for NT cattle producers, and whether Senepol/Brahman cross cattle perform well under the NT's often extreme conditions.

Tim Schatz, Principal Pastoral Production Research Officer, said Senepols were chosen for the project due to the fact they're a tropically adapted *Bos Taurus* breed with good meat quality and first cross offspring are polled or scurred.

Though still in its very early stages, the project's first crop of calves was weaned in 2010 and preliminary results show some interesting data.

Results to date show average weaning weights were higher in both male (+21kg) and female



Some of the F1 Senepol/Brahman-cross weaners.

(+13) F1 Senepol/Brahman cross weaners compared to Brahman.

F1 Senepol/Brahman cross heifers grew 13kg more over the post-weaning dry season, from May to November 2010.

Male Brahman and F1 Senepol/Brahman cross weaners were transported to the Douglas Daly Research Farm to grow out on improved pasture, and their performance showed an increase in the F1 Senepol/Brahman cross advantage over Brahman by a further 10kg.

"The signs are promising that

crossbreeding with Senepols will be a way that NT cattle producers can produce cattle that grow well under NT conditions and are suitable for both the live export and Australian domestic markets," Mr Schatz said.

"It should be noted that the F1 Senepol/Brahman cross have the advantage of hybrid vigour as they are a first cross, but the fact that they have performed better than Brahman so far indicates that they can perform at least as well under NT conditions."

With cattle destined for the live export market to Indonesia now set

a 350kg weight limit, Mr Schatz said producers needed to be able to produce an animal that could also be easily sold into domestic markets and attract a premium.

"The other element is when we get this proposed abattoir built in the NT, producers will be able to supply animals with better meat qualities for that as well," he said.

The project sourced Senepol bulls from Central Queensland producer, Geoff Maynard, 5 Star Senepols, Jambin.

Mr Maynard said the issue of fertility became even more important in the north due to the 350kg Indonesian weight restrictions.

He said the prospect of a looming carbon tax, especially if it was imposed on direct emissions from agriculture down the track, meant fertility and having cows that consis-

tently produced the "bread and butter" would be vital.

He said while some NT producers had introduced Senepols into their crossbreeding operation, none had done so on a large scale to date.

"I think it's probably only tradition that has prevented people from looking at the Senepols before now," Mr Maynard said.

Among the other research projects under way at Katherine Research Station is an ongoing Selected Brahman Project, looking at fertility.

The NT Department of Resources has been selecting for fertility in a Brahman herd since 1994 using objective selection on fertility traits and the Breedplan genetic evaluation system.

Significant improvements in

fertility have been made. Pregnancy rates from yearling mating were on average 35 percent higher in heifers from the Selected herd than heifers from Commercial herds.

The mature cows from the Selected herd have also been found to be more fertile than commercial Brahman.

Pregnancy rates in lactating cows at the first weaning round were on average 37pc higher in the selected Brahman herd than in an unselected commercial herd between 2004 and 2009.

The improvement in fertility can also be seen in the way the estimated breeding values (EBVs) for Breedplan fertility traits have improved markedly in the selected herd compared to the Brahman breed society average since selection began in 1994.

Expanding global market options

THE Middle East and Vietnam are among the markets northern Australia's cattle industry could view as providing major marketing opportunities on a global level.

That was among the messages delivered by Professor Ken Chern as keynote speaker at the NT Cattleman's Association annual conference at Katherine last month during his presentation on the topic "Australia in Asia and the World - the Quest for Balance".

A professorial research fellow at Murdoch University, WA, Prof Chern is an expert in Asian affairs with his former posts including Director of Asian Affairs in the White House.

Prof Chern said recent exports statistics demonstrate the wisdom of the NT in continuing to expand its range of export options while deepening ties with traditional trading partners like Indonesia.

"Looking at cattle from all over Australia, exports to Indonesia from July 2010 to January 2011 were down 45 percent compared with the same period a year earlier, and exports to all of Asia were down 41pc," he said.



Professor Ken Chern, who was keynote speaker at the NT Cattleman's Association conference in Katherine on April 1.

"For the same period, Australia-wide cattle exports to the Middle East were up 145pc, a vast increase, especially in Turkey, which dropped its tariff barriers and where the number of cattle exported went from 168 head to over 66,000 head.

"Given the concerns among Middle East governments to ensure food security, trade ties in cattle with those nations it seems to me are worth a closer look. Russia has also more than doubled its take, and there's a very big increase in Israel as well. Within Asia, Vietnam, aspiring to become the next Asian tiger is looking to source the supply of increasing meat

demand from some off-shore locations as well."

Prof Chern said that, like most other nations in the Asia-Pacific, Australia had a vital national interest in preserving and strengthening an open international trading system, and in watching the relationship between the US and China.

"It's clear Australia has a great stake in US-China relations because China is Australia's greatest trading partner, and the US is Australia's closest ally," he said. "Like all nations in the Asia-Pacific, Australia will be greatly affected by the ability or inability of China and the US to get along."

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