

# Senepols lead Primex weight gains

By JON CONDON

PRODIGIOUS weight gains were in evidence when competitors assembled for a mid-term progress field day for entries in the 2010 Primex Pacific Beef Carcase Competition last Wednesday.

A dozen teams, each made up of four steers, are on feed at Maydan feedlot near Warwick for the inaugural competition, due to conclude at Primex Field Days on June 18.

A wide variety of Taurus and Indicus genetics are represented in entries drawn from as far north as Mackay and south to the NSW Northern Rivers district.

When weighed at the 46-day mark, the mob was averaging an extraordinary 2.69kg/day, on a wheat-based tempered grain ration incorporating a pre-mix supplement from Riverina Stockfeeds. The highest placed group of steers averaged 3.21kg, with one 'rogue' beast in that team gaining at 3.57kg/day.

On an as-fed basis, the competition cattle ate just over 13kg of ration/day (10kg/day on a dry matter basis).

While that rate of consumption is not unusually high, when the rate of gain is factored in, the net feed conversion efficiency figures are exceptional by any grainfed industry standards.

On an as-fed basis, the mob's average conversion ratio was 4.9:1, and on a dry matter basis, less than 4:1.

There are several clues to the high rates of gain and conversion performance.

The first was the almost

complete absence of respiratory problems – despite autumn being a 'high-risk' time of year for bovine respiratory disease, just a single beast had to be pulled for treatment during the first 46 days.

All entries received Dectomax, five-in-one, single-shot Bovilis MH and Rhinogard, and Synovex TBA aggressive implant at arrival. At least some entries also received a precursor Bovilis MH and Rhinogard shot prior to despatch to the feedlot; however, the short organisational window available for this year's inaugural competition meant that not all cattle necessarily received a pre-feedlot vaccination. Two-shot programs will be mandated from next year, organisers say.

Another factor in the result was that all entries were vendor bred and co-mingled prior to induction, and had not been exposed to saleyard or trader conditions which could elevate feedlot performance risk.

Leading the weightgain statistics at the half-way point was a team of second-cross Senepol/Angus steers exhibited by Hugh Barnett, Australis Stud, Ardee, Goomburra Valley. Next best was a group of Simmental crosses from Bruce Jorgensen, Mummelgum, averaging 3.02kg/day.

"Some people have a preconceived ideal that Senepol cattle may lack a little in weightgain and growth potential, but these steers show that's not the case," Mr Barnett said. "We're now looking forward to the carcase phase, because Senepols have great potential to deliver on meat quality, also."

Competition coordinator



Hugh Barnett looks over his second-cross Senepol steers leading the weightgain section in the Pacific Beef Carcase Competition.

Jason Strong admitted that the exceptional statistics recorded so far presented something of a headache in how to award points for growth rate.

"We had a point scale in mind as to how we were going to make distinctions between entries on growth rate, but all of the cattle have actually exceeded those initial expectations, so we're going to have to revisit that scale," he said.

Similarly, animal health points were intended to revolve around a five-point deduction for pulling and treatment, but virtu-

ally all cattle were currently sitting on maximum points for health.

"It's a nice problem to have, and certainly good for all the participants, but it makes it just a little harder to unearth the elite performers," he said.

Mr Strong said there were a lot of risks from an animal health viewpoint in bringing together a mob of cattle from such a wide variety of backgrounds, which is often reflected both in pen sickness and performance.

"But that was certainly not the case with this group of cattle,

which have performed extremely well, by any standards," he said.

"While there are perceptions about what different breeds might do in terms of growth rate, the results suggest that given decent genetics and health protocol, breed type becomes somewhat secondary in extracting desirable feedlot performance."

Mr Strong stressed that the feedlot result was only a small part of the overall performance story that would emerge by the end of the competition.

"It would be dangerous to start picking winners and losers,

based on how the cattle have performed and look at this early stage," he said. "The live animal contribution to the final points tally is quite small in comparison with the overall result, where meat quality and yield attributes will come into effect."

Maydan livestock manager Chris Rickert said being conscious of how gain results could vary depending on how they were calculated, effort was made to eliminate undesirable influences that might affect figures.

"It's easy to record big weightgains in feedlot cattle if you want to: weigh them in empty after being on the truck off feed and water for a day or two, and weigh them out full," he said.

"To try to avoid that, we didn't weigh the cattle until induction, five days after arrival. Despite that, we think we still picked up a little compensatory weight from not being completely full at the start. However that impact is likely to diminish, as the number of days on feed extends. A 10kg difference has double the impact on gains recorded over 46 days, as it does over 100 days," he said.

Close-out of the competition cattle is due in late May, with processing happening at Northern Cooperative Meat Co, Casino, in early June in time for a final results briefing at Primex Field Days on June 18.

Maydan field day visitors were treated to a delicious Cabassi & Rea Wagyu steak provided by Brisbane's Kobe's Butchery, produced from cattle fed earlier at the feedlot.

● Field day pictures, see Town & Country South section.