CATTLE FOR SMALL PROPERTIES

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

We have a small property – 16 ha plus 8 leased.

We started with 16 Hereford steers 10 years ago and decided there might be more interest in breeding.

We researched a number of small breeds that we thought may be suitable for a small property (after discarding grapes, olives, Alpacas and goats) and looked closely at Dexters, Miniature Galloway, Miniature Hereford, Squaremeaters and Australian Lowlines.

We selected Lowlines and started with two cows in calf in Jan 1998.

Our business plan included a positive cash flow requirement in Year 4 (2001) – we have an ABN number.

We now have approx 25 breeders, three bulls and some weaners with next calves due Mar/Apr. Total numbers vary with conditions – seasons and sales – and can be up to 75 head in Spring.

WHY DID WE SELECT AUSTRALIAN LOWLINES?

- availability – new breed but good numbers
- black
- temperament
- ease of handling
- no horns – naturally polled
- run more per hectare than large breeds
- require more modest fencing – light one and two strand electric
- lesser requirement for yards, cattle crush external fencing
- lighter on pasture – less pugging
- low birth weights
- calving ease
- early maturing, high growth rates
- 250 registered breeders and growing
WHY DO WE RECOMMEND AUSTRALIAN LOWLINES NOW?

- all of the above
- meat quality – marbling and tenderness- Genestar typing
- high carcase yield – 59% of liveweight
- highly fertile
- great feed converters - maintain condition in poor seasons
- carrying rate – see side summary – approx carrying rates
- supportive Breed Association
- growth in members of Breed Assoc – stud, commercial junior
- interaction and cooperation between breeders
- quality stock available at realistic prices
- good markets available- see below
- customers who come back
- good, enjoyable family activity.

KEY INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS

- Cash and a farm
- have a plan
- animal handling
- Animal husbandry
- Use good genetics
- Reliable Water
- Sound Fencing plus laneways
- Soil tests
- soil fertility
- pasture development
- understand nutrition requirements – quantity & quality
- DON’T OVERFEED
- understand how much feed you can produce
- do a feed budget
- know how to finish your animals and how they should look
- know how to sell your animals
- network – ask for help, share knowledge
- ENJOY YOUR FARM AND YOUR LIFESTYLE.
MARKETS AVAILABLE

. Steers – weaners to small farms, grown out steers to abattoir
. Commercial heifers – weaners and joining age heifers to small farms
. Commercial bulls to Dairy & Beef breeders for first calving ease
. Stud bulls to Lowline, Dairy & Beef breeders.
. Stud cows to Lowline breeders
. Lease bulls to commercial producers including small acreage breeders
. Semen, embryos & recipients (PTIC) to Lowline breeders
. Victoria, Interstate (Johnes assessed) and overseas markets
. Well bred, well fed, well grown steers attractive to abattoir & butchers

APPROXIMATE CARRYING RATES

(Note: data for various animal consumption rates has been extracted from a Dept of Agriculture “AgNote” published in “Beef Manager”)

“DM/day” is the Dry Matter equivalent weight in pasture or foodstuff consumed by cattle per day and is a maximum number that could be consumed regardless of the protein level. When protein levels are realistically high and knowing that the Metabolisable Energy (ME) requirement in megajoules per day is finite for any particular animal the estimates of DM per day used here exaggerate the likely situation and means the assumptions here are conservative – ie consumption rates would be lower in most conditions than assumed here.

If we consider 2 herds – the first Lowline size cattle and the second “full size” cattle –

Lowline
26 x 350kg cows consuming 8.5kgs of DM/day consume 221kgs/day
26 x 300kg steers/heifers @ 7.5kgs DM/day 195
1 x 500kg bull @ 10.7kgsDM/day 10.7
426.7 kgs

“Full Size”
20 x 550kg cows @ 11.2 kgs DM/day 224
20 x 400kg steers/heifers @ 9.4 kgs DM/day 188
1 x 800kg bull @ 14.4 kgs DM/day 14.4
426.4 kgs

Note that consumption rates would be lower than indicated with good quality pasture and that a minimum of 30% more Lowlines can be carried compared with full size animals
On the assumption that steers would be feeding from their mothers for 6 months the maximum annual pasture consumption of the two herds would be –

53 Lowlines would consume 118,000kgs pa maximum
41 “Full size” animals would consume 121,000kgs pa max

An undeveloped pasture might produce 3000kgs/ha/pa: a pasture with some development to a “good” stage might produce 5,500kgs/ha/pa and a really well developed pasture 10-12,000kgs/ha/pa.

If each property is 16 hectares –
The first property will produce 48,000kgs DM pa
The second 88,000kgs DM pa and the third up to 192,000kgs DM pa.

Because the pasture won’t be uniformly produced across the year it is reasonable to expect about 60% consumption of the pasture production by grazing animals.

Thus the first low pasture property could realistically run about one third of either herd: the intermediate pasture property about one half of either herd and the third property comfortably run either complete herd.

**APPROXIMATE CARCASE CONVERSION**

Lowline steers regularly produce carcases at 59% of liveweight whereas larger breeds frequently achieve within the range of 52.5 – 54%.

Using our two “demonstration herds” –
The 26 x 300kg Lowlines @59% produce 4602kgs of carcase
The 20 x 400kg steers @ 54% produce 4320 kgs of carcase

The Lowlines consuming the same amount of pasture produce 6.5% more carcase meat in this example.