

Accurate data on bulls pays in steer production

BY RUTH SCHWAGER

THE hybrid vigour that comes with composite genetics is allowing the Mathie family to finish steers to supermarket and export weights and achieving exceptional meat grading results.

Andrew Mathie and his son Daniel Mathie run 2000 composite breeders with an Angus base at Wybalena, Holbrook, and trade cattle when the season and market allow.

The family has been breeding its own composite bulls since the 1990s, with Simmental, Shorthorn and Gelbvieh genetics used.

Hicks Beef genetics have been used for many years, with the Hicks family, also from Holbrook, creating the Australian Beef Composites breed, which is known for fertility, growth and carcass quality.

"We have a lot of respect for the Hicks herd, because they're proven bulls with accurate data," Daniel Mathie said.

"We like the fact that Hicks bulls are well recorded and they've got exceptional performance figures; they're at the top of the international database.

"With their bulls we're getting the hybrid vigour but they've also already selected the best bulls on growth and carcass quality."

Hicks Beef's pedigree and data is analysed through International Genetic Solutions, based in the US, which is the world's biggest database, with almost 20 million cattle evaluated.

It's the first multi-breed analysis to incorpo-



DATA PROJECT: Daniel Mathie and his wife Hannah and daughter Lydia, and some of their composite cattle.

rate genomics.

The Mathies are now working with Hicks Beef to analyse the on-farm and carcass performance of their bulls, with 500 commercial heifers artificially inseminated to six Hicks bulls this year.

"There's an emphasis on calving ease, being heifers, so we'll record their calving ease over coming weeks," Mr Mathie said.

"We'll also record on-farm performance with weight gains, but the focus is on the final data at processing, the carcass measurements and MSA grading."

Each calf will be DNA tested with the genotype recorded which could help identify markers of carcass

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Daniel Mathie, Wybalena, Holbrook

traits, including eye muscle area, intramuscular fat, retail beef yield and fat.

"It's a practical way to access and use data to make breeding decisions," Mr Mathie said.

"We're getting the best, proven genetics from a respected breeder, and we can give them useful feedback from the processor."

The Mathies finish all their steers, targeting the MSA market, and continued to fatten to processing weights, dressing 280 to 350 kilograms, throughout the drought.

MSA compliance for all steers sold over the past 12 months has been 98.7 per cent.

Most of the property has

improved pastures, including phalaris and sub-clovers, and the family grows a mix of annual ryegrass, ryecorn and oats, as well as tillage radish which improves soil health and structure by breaking up the soil.

"We don't really get the full value of hybrid vigour if we're selling calves as feeders," Mr Mathie said.

"We finished them in drought lots in the past few years with a mixer wagon, using grain we bought in and our own silage that we had stored.

"This year some will finish on grass, and some on a ration, depending on the season."

When choosing genetics,


maternal traits are the priority, as they retain most of their heifers each year.


The Mathies select bulls for calving ease, growth, fertility and longevity of breeding life.


They've spent many years building up the herd after downsizing in drought in 2007, so with the most recent drought, they chose to hang on to all breeders.

"In 2007 we sold most of the cows and retained heifers, so it was expensive to buy back in after that and took a while to build back up," Mr Mathie said.

"This time we retained our cows and fed them through which has definitely been worthwhile."







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