



# HICKS BEEF

**Spring 2023 Newsletter**

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## **SPRING BULL SALE: Wednesday 6th September, 2023** **1.00pm “Annandale South” Holbrook NSW**

**SELLING - 95 BULLS**  
**AUCTIONS PLUS • ALL LOTS ON VIDEO**

### **Hicks Beef**

Since our last bull sale in March, we have been busy, even though it is supposed to be our quiet time. Our season has been very good so far with a good start to the Autumn and early winter, the mild conditions have been great for grass growth through the usually slow winter months.

The 2023 line up is shaping up very well with 95 lots catalogued for the Spring Bull Sale on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> September. The bulls we are putting forward reflect our breeding objective, to produce cattle that improve profitability per hectare. We are doing this by having a balanced approach when it comes to breeding cattle. Focusing

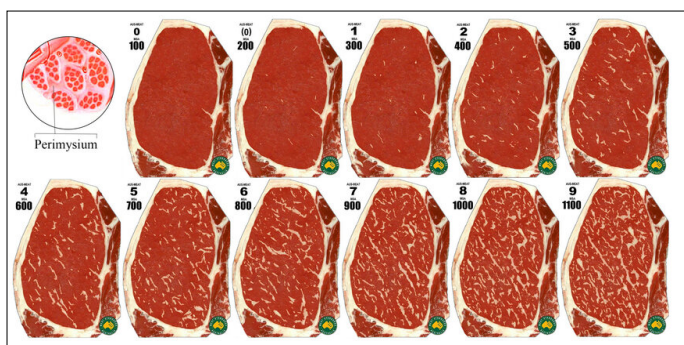
on a strict set of criteria when we select sires; all sires must be at the top of the tree regarding their economically relevant indexes, structure and type, all sires must tick all of these boxes to be part of the team.

We would like to invite anyone to come and have a look through our herd anytime, it is a great way to learn about what we are doing and why. Often people are worried about disturbing us prior to the sale, but customer service is a big part of our job, and we enjoy taking the time to show people around, if this is of interest, please ring Tom on 0448 796 124.



## Hicks Beef Carcase Data

Last year we sold our entire drop of 2021 steers to Greenhams. Most years we sell a large portion of our steers to them to be finished on grass in the longer growing season areas of Victoria. This year rather than finish our steers on grass Greenhams put our steers on grain to finish them instead. They were very pleased with the results with the tops of the steers reaching a marble score 7 and averaging marble score 4. Not only did they marble well they also maintained high eye muscle area with the top steers reaching 84cm and the pen averaging 77cm. Quality and yield are negatively correlated, meaning that as one improves the other generally reduces. A disciplined breeding program with a clear set of objectives is needed to achieve both quality and quantity, selecting only elite sires that excel in both areas is paramount.



Another feature of our program that allows us to focus on creating elite carcasses that marble and yield is our use of breed complementarity within our herd. This enables us to leverage the strengths of different breeds to super charge genetic improvement. Using a high carcass quality line and blending it with a higher yielding line results in progeny that do both well, you can have your cake and eat it too.

### Hicks Beef Steers Kill Data 15/6/23

-----MSA Grading Results-----									
Hump	Oss	Mb	MSA	Mb	FC	MC	Rib	pH	EMA Index
75	153	4.35	658	1			15	5.5	77
75	153	4.35	658	1			15	5.5	77

“They would be as profitable pen of steers you would find anywhere”

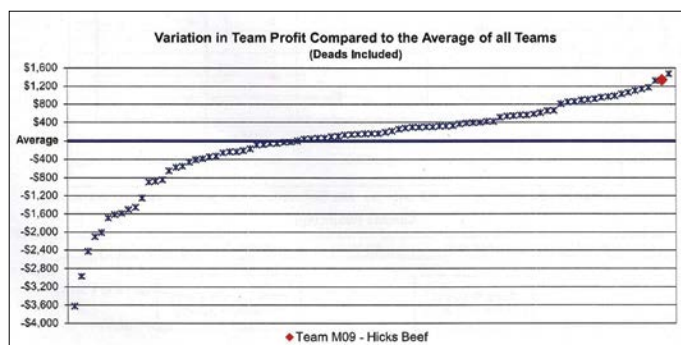
Michael Campbell, Legendary Beef

## Marbling Matters

We often hear the comment from people that marbling does not matter as we are not being paid for it. The value-based grids and premiums may not be as widely adapted as we would all like them to be, but it is still a very important trait to focus on. Overtime we believe that producers will be rewarded for superior genetics as the technology to measure carcasses improves. It will be easier for processors to assess and track what cattle are performing and what cattle are dragging the chain.

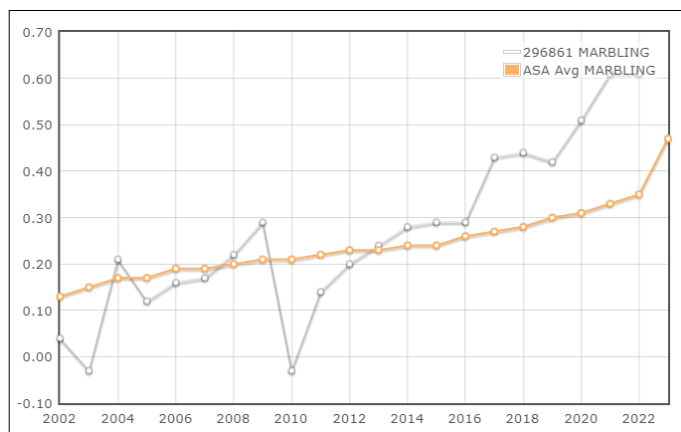
From the Teys Steer Feedlot trial, it is clear there is a vast difference in profitability between genetics, with some teams (5 steers per team), earning \$1400 more than the average and some \$7500 below the average. To be in the top percentile band steers must put on a lot of weight, have minimal health treatments, and produce high quality carcasses.

The graph below shows the variation in profitability of the teams of steers in the The Teys 2023 Steer Feedback Trial. The Hicks Beef Champion Team M09 is right up the top.



### Why feedlotters like our cattle.

In our herd we have been selecting heavily for marbling for longer than I can remember, it is a highly heritable trait that is relatively easy to record and therefore easy to improve without having too much of an impact on other traits. In doing this we have significantly changed the marble score of our cattle and in turn our clients' cattle. This reputation for high performing genetics has created demand for our genetics from feedlots and processors, when the market is running hot, everything sells well, but when things ease off a bit like they have over the past 6 months it is important to stay at the top of the buyers list.



The Hicks Beef herd, Ident number 296861, averages in the top 12% of the ASA database for marbling.



# Our Aim is to Improve Your Herd

**Calving Ease and Birth Weight** These are very important economic traits and can only be improved by measurement. Not all seedstock producers record birth weights or record them accurately because it is one of the hardest measurements to take. It requires a lot of time and skill to do effectively, it must be done every day, it doesn't matter if it's rain hail or shine the calves need to be weighed. The accuracy of our data recording, which is then enhanced by genomic analysis, insures a trouble-free calving.

**Fertility** All females are joined for a 6-week period, if they aren't pregnant, they are not in the herd, there are no exceptions to this rule.

**Stayability** This is how long a cow stays in the herd. Fertility is the key to stayability, along with soundness, traits that are both enhanced by hybrid vigour.

**Growth** We select for fast early growth in our cattle. We balance growth with calving ease and also with lower mature cow weight to decrease the cost of maintaining big cows. Larger sows eat more and tend to drop out of the herd in hard times.

**Sound and Docile** Like many of these traits there is no room to compromise. If animals aren't sound in the feet and legs when independently assessed by Liam Cardile, they are out of the herd. The same goes for docility, any animal assessed as stirry is out. As well as Liam's assessment, a bad day in the cattle yards will see an animal to the market, even if previously assessed as ok.

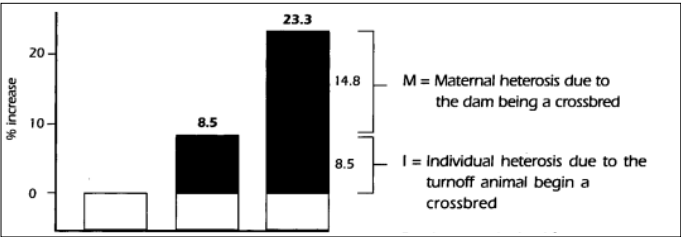
**Carcase** We search for elite carcass cattle and have always selected bulls at the very top end for marbling and muscle. This has shown in our steer trial results and kill sheets. See the article on our steer kill sheets in this newsletter. When our steers averaged 4.4 marbling and 77 sq cm eye muscle it shows our program is working and attracting buyers to our cattle.

**Consistency of Composites** Extensive research shows that composite cattle are as consistent as their purebred counterparts in all key areas. In fact, we have found we don't seem to get as many poor doing or plain calves, we attribute this to the improved healthiness that is a result of hybrid vigour.

**Marketing** Our success in the Teys Beef spectacular feedlot trial has been a great way to validate the performance of our herd. In addition to this the consistent performance of ours and our client's progeny across a variety of environments and markets has further validated our brand.

## Hybrid Vigour the free lunch

Recently I heard an interesting discussion around is hybrid vigour a free lunch, or do the costs associated with the increased gains offset some of the advantage? To understand we need to break down how hybrid vigour works and where it has the biggest impact. The largest impact is on the lowly heritable traits such as reproduction, the heritability estimate is around 10% meaning that it is harder to make improvement through genetic selection alone. Growth on the other hand is a highly heritable trait (50% to 60%) therefore hybrid vigour has less of an impact on growth than it does fertility.



The above table describes the different types of hybrid vigour and how much of the gain they make up. Of the total advantage of 23.3% is mostly made up from maternal heterosis, this includes improved fertility, health, survivability, cow longevity and calf survivability. These traits are all high impact economically relevant traits as they improve the efficiency of the cow herd. All these traits do not require any additional inputs as they improve. The individual (or direct as some people know it) heterosis is still an important part of the overall picture and is very valuable as well, the difference is that for cattle to gain more they need to eat more. This the same in straightbred populations of cattle that select for growth as the growth rate increases so does intake. This is not to say that growth is not an economic relevant trait, it just does have an associated cost with it through increased appetite.

## Red Angus Sires

### HICKS ORACLE Q39

This is a bull we see as an important part of the puzzle. He gives us top of the breed growth for 200, 400 and 600 day weight. His carcass numbers reflect high marbling – top 5% and big eye muscle area – top 5%. This is a unique bull. His US figures, complete with DNA genomic analysis, shows him to be the highest growth bull of any breed that we used, this combines with top 4% marbling, and top 25% rib eye from a data base of over 20 million cattle worldwide. He also ranks top 1% for Terminal Index. What doesn't he do? His calving ease needs improvement, but mated to some of the best calving ease cows, he is breeding the house down.

### 3SCC DOMAIN A163

A thick set sire that was the most used sire in the US for 2020, popular for his balanced figures and noted for sound feet and sound udders in his female progeny.



3SCC Domain A163

### HICKS MARBLE BAR N30

This is the most used bull in the breed. His popularity is based on his breed leading calving ease, top marbling and positive back fat. He produces thick, easy doing cattle that are sound and calve with very little supervision. His females make up a large percentage of our Hicks Red Angus herd.

# Caring For Our Land

Thirty-seven years ago, we moved to Holbrook from Yellingbo in the Yarra Valley. We were lucky enough to buy "Annandale South", a large undeveloped farm.

The farm had paddocks up to 1200 acres in size. The existing fencing was in very poor shape, and it had been set stocked with as many (or more) cattle as it could hold, as was evidenced by the large numbers of carcase bones strewn across the paddocks. The first of our cattle to arrive started in the house paddock and had improved themselves to the back paddock by the next morning and didn't use the gates. The fences were shot.

Our priority was fencing, initially patching some, but generally renewing, which gave us our first opportunity to do some Landcare work, to fence out and create new paddocks according to different land types.

It was soon after we arrived in Holbrook that Landcare started. I was lucky enough to be invited to join the board. Landcare is an organisation that encourages farmers to leave their properties in better shape than when they took over management. Farmers learnt together; from each other and from the best people we could find to improve our knowledge. Some of the practices included

Whole Farm Planning, the establishment of perennial pastures for enhanced productivity and better soil cover, planting of trees for shade, shelter and bird habitat. Bringing native birds back to our farms to balance the insect populations would hopefully reduce the dieback that was rapidly reducing our paddock tree numbers. Our creeks and waterways were also showing signs of 180 years of settlement, with erosion, sedimentation, and reduction in native fish.

Landcare showed us how to establish pastures with lime and direct drilling, and the use of Phalaris with suitable applications of P. Many farmers fenced off creeks and waterways, allowing native reeds such as Phragmites and other native grasses to grow in eroded gullies to stabilise the banks, slow down water movement and retain silt. Trees and under story plants were also planted to maintain creek banks.

Holbrook Landcare has won State and Federal awards for their projects. Holbrook farms are more productive, more ecologically balanced, and beautiful due to the community uniting under the Landcare banner and learning together how to better care for the country.

## BEFORE



## AFTER

