

Feedback

Measure, monitor and meet the market

Fiona Conroy and Cam Nicholson are working to ensure they are in no danger of falling behind the advance of genetic progress.

Snapshot

Fiona Conroy and Cam Nicholson, Geelong, Vic.



Property:
290ha

Enterprise:
Self-replacing, performance-recorded Angus herd producing steers for the long-fed market

Livestock:
200-300 breeders (depending on seasonal conditions)

Pasture:
Phalaris, ryegrass, sub-clover, fescue

Soil:
Clay loam

Rainfall:
550mm



Genetic gain

Want to learn more about the power of genetics in your beef business?

Module four 'cattle genetics' from the *More Beef from Pastures* manual: www.mla.com.au/mbfp

Breedplan: <http://breedplan.une.edu.au>

Animal Breeding and Genetics Unit at the University of New England: <http://agbu.une.edu.au>

Agricultural Business Research Institute: <http://abri.une.edu.au>

For northern producers go to: www.futurebeef.com.au/topics/breeding-and-genetics

Watch a webcast of Dr Rob Banks (geneticist and Director of AGBU) speaking on 'Using genetics to increase farm profit' at MLA's Hamilton Meat Profit Day at www.mla.com.au/hamiltonMPD

The couple use a swag of tools to enhance their herd's performance, including BREEDPLAN, artificial insemination and performance recording, to produce steers for the long-fed market.

"I think the compulsion to measure animal performance started with my dad more than 20 years ago, and we've built on it from there," Fiona said.

"If you can measure something, you can see if it's getting better."

Fiona and Cam encouraged producers to invest time in developing a strong, mutually beneficial relationship with their seedstock supplier.

"It's extremely important. A cow's genetic impact is on one calf a year, whereas a sire makes his mark on 50 or 60, influencing not only what traits change but the rate at which you improve your herd," Fiona said.

Fiona and Cam run a self-replacing, commercially registered Angus herd (ACR), are foundation members of Team Te Mania (which consists of more than 40 herds based on Te Mania Angus genetics) and participate in its progeny test program.

Their females are moderately framed, highly fertile and good doers.

"A key driver of profitability is fertility, so we place strong emphasis on reproduction traits," Fiona said.

"We're also part-time producers, so we need a herd that's capable of calving with minimal assistance."

Fiona and Cam have a simple wish list when sourcing new genetics, with a focus on reproduction, mature cow size and the long-fed \$Index.

"In particular, we want below-breed-average birth weights, above breed average calving ease values, low days to calving and positive intramuscular fat," Fiona said.

"We also focus on good growth traits, below average mature cow weight and I always look at the long-fed index.

"We run high stocking rates of around 23 DSE/ha so, overall, moderate sized mature cows with some fat cover work better for us but it is horses-for-courses. What you run depends on your environment and how you farm."

Despite their off-farm work demands and family commitments, the couple manage all their herd-recording requirements. Because of their years of measuring, they can track significant changes in their herd that have improved their profitability.

Intramuscular fat Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs) in their steers, which usually go to the Rangers Valley Feedlot in northern NSW at 14-16 months of age, weighing an average 450kg, has gone from being negative in 1993 to more than two in 2011 (the breed average was 0.8).

"They are also above breed average for eye muscle area and rib and rump fat," Fiona said.

"The feedback from Rangers Valley is our steers are in the top 5% for profitability for the feedlot."

The couple's cows have below average days to calving EBVs and the heifers are calving earlier each year, even if it's just by a day or so.

Anything that fails to get pregnant, has trouble calving or fails to raise a calf satisfactorily is turned off.



Fiona Conroy

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