



Dennis and Susie Stewart, with Angus weaners at Cugong Station, near Condobolin.

# Condobolin Angus ticks the boxes for feedlots

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**C**UGONG Station covers 8498 hectares, stretching 26 kilometres north from Lachlan River irrigation country. Cattle producers Dennis and Susie Stewart first settled near Condobolin in 1982 and now run what is the amalgamation of four properties.

It is home to 800 Angus breeders, and the Stewarts, as members of team Te Mania, are focused on fine-tuning their black cattle for the feedlot market.

For the past eight years the Stewarts have been on Te Mania bloodlines.

The name alone attracted a premium price and had a reputation in the cattle game, Mr Stewart said.

"There's 42 breeders in team Te Mania, and we lease bulls for a three-year period and then they're replaced," he said.

"It's a great deal for producers – we're always getting the latest injection of developed genetics."

Each year the Stewarts turn off 400 steers, bound for both northern and southern feedlot areas – Rangers Valley, near Glen Innes, and Steve McKay at Yanco.

Ideally, they weigh between 380 kilograms and 420kg at 14 to 15 months old.

The consistency of the feedlot market and the feedback were a bonus, Mr Stewart said.

"They send back the details of their weight gains and marble score, so we know where we're going with them," he said.

"We're looking to develop intramuscular fat, and growth rates of course are important as well.

"The marble score we aim for is around four at the moment and that is another area we are working on; that is a heritable trait."

Mr Stewart said while figures were important, visual appraisal was equally as vital to breeding a "balanced beast".

Their female numbers were split in two to allow for spring and autumn calving.

Each herd was made up of 400 breeders, and each year about 160 heifers in total were retained and the same numbers of unproductive breeders sold off the other end, normally through the Forbes saleyards or direct to Teys, Wagga Wagga.

"We add about 80 heifers to each of the two herds annually to replace any older cows or cull breeders, so we keep them fresh," Mr Stewart said.

An artificial insemination (AI) program was another exciting move for the Stewarts.

Annually, they sell 100 artificially inseminated heifers on AuctionsPlus, at about 14 months old.

"When we sell them at that age they're

having calves about two-years-old, so they're then ready to become true breeders," Mr Stewart said.

"We sell special females via AuctionsPlus because we use the best genetics Te Mania can offer; by artificially inseminating them, it tightens up the calving.

"Normally, if they're joined over a two-month period you can be out morning and night.

"This way they all calve across a week, it lessens your workload that way and they're more consistent."

Yard weaning aside, the Stewarts don't supplementary feed.

Most of Cugong Station was pasture improved.

They maintained a lucerne/medic clover mix, usually sown under a cereal.

The Stewarts planted 607ha in total – a mix of grazing variety Yarran oats and a wheat crop – and also had two share farmers who cropped part of the property.

"We just farm for our stock basically and under sowing our pasture works in well with their cropping rotations."

They were also going to lengths to drought proof their property and in recent times had installed two pipeline systems which allowed water to be reticulated to every paddock.

"The 2000 to 2010 drought was a pretty tough time for us and from that period we learnt we have to do a lot to cover ourselves in case events like that happen again," Mr Stewart said.

"But you can't do everything in five minutes, it's an ongoing plan.

"We're also developing storage so we can see through a drought with feed, we're working on the notion of trying to handle a two-year drought and if it goes further than that we will have to reduce our cattle numbers."

The Stewarts were currently fully stocked and were due for calving again in November/December.

"But we're lucky enough we can see feed through until spring at least," Mr Stewart said.

"In general terms agriculture is in a great place; whether you're wool, lamb, cattle or if you have debt it's low interest rates, it's an unusual combination and it's a great time to be a farmer."

