

## Doing the ordinary, extraordinarily at Habbies Howe



By Sheena Coffey  
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Scott McKay and long-time Habbies Howe manager Les Gates pictured at the Highlands property.

SCOTT McKay loves his footy.

Melbourne logos are dotted throughout the kitchen – stuck tight to a window pane in the kitchen door and on caps hung along a coat rack.

And it is words spoken by Ron Barassi, Mr McKay's favourite footballer, that have driven operations at the family farm Habbies Howe, located at the southern end of the Strathbogie ranges at Highlands – just to do the ordinary things extraordinarily well.

"We don't do anything fancy, we just make sure we do it properly," Mr McKay said.

The tactic has proven itself again and again with the end product of his 1000 head Angus breeding herd - steer weaners

sold through Yea store markets - regularly kicking goals for the commercial breeding operation.

Before the weaners hit the yards however, there has been a dedicated focus on fertility occurring on property.

Paramount to the operation's success has been a tight heifer joining, preceeded by a five-week rotation around some of the property's better pastures, before heifers are joined at 15 months of age and a minimum 300 kilograms.

Joined for a six-week period, beginning mid-May, with bulls out by the end of June, heifers are given an extra month recovery before their second joining.

And with only two cycles to get in calf, Mr McKay said poor performers are picked up early and culled.

These changes, made after noticing a low second-calving percentage, have pushed calving percentages to sit in line with the rest of the breeding herd, Mr McKay said.

The second calvers are set-stocked and given the very best treatment, with this age group the hardest of the lot to get into calf, according to Mr McKay.