

OBJECTIVES IN FOCUS AT WARREN

(Article courtesy The Land, By Natalie Elias, January 2011)

AS THEIR Angus enterprise expands, Garry and Leanne Hall, “The Mole”, Warren, are keeping their production objectives firmly in focus to ensure a harmonious rise in herd size and quality.

This was the first year the Halls had joined 800 females – an increase from 550 – on the 5250-hectare property, which has been in Mr Hall’s family since 1936.

Pregnancy testing had been common practice at “The Mole” since the early 1970s, and maintaining a high level of fertility in females had always been at the top of the breeding objectives list.

“We are aiming for females whose energy requirements are not too high,” Mr Hall said. “We want cows that, in a marginal environment and an average season, can still get back in calf, and as soon as possible.” Any heifers that failed to produce a calf, or cows that did not conceive each year, were culled. Mr Hall said while optimizing fertility was the main focus when culling, traits like gestation length, survivability, good conformation and constitution were also considered. The Halls, who have a strong focus on performance genetics, in the past had drawn on bloodlines from Wallaroy and Ardenside studs. For the the past six years, however, they had used bulls from Te Mania. Mr Hall said the bulls had always performed well.

In early 2010, they had also joined Team Te Mania – an alliance of Angus producers from across Victoria, NSW and South Australia who used Te Mania genetics.

All the members had access to the latest Te Mania genetics through a bull leasing program and collectively marketed their beef. They also worked together to advance the fertility and performance of their herds, resulting in more cattle reaching commercial targets in shorter periods.

The nucleus herd also benefited from vital production feedback, which was then used to further finetune the genetic program.

Mr Hall said at first he was slightly apprehensive about signing up to a group, feeling that it might mean relinquishing some control of his enterprise.

“It was a big decision for us, as we are particularly conscious of the quality of animals we bring on to our property,” he said. Nearly 12 months on, however, he had no regrets and felt a better article and improved market access would result. He also enjoyed engaging with other team members.

The Halls aim to grow steers out to 420 kilograms before selling direct to Rangers Valley feedlot, Glen Innes, for finishing.

Any surplus cattle were first offered to fellow Team Te Mania members before being sold at the Walgett feature store cattle sale.

Cows were joined at a ratio of about 50 females to one bull in late September for a June/July calving. Breeder heifers were joined the following September at 15 months.

Artificial insemination had never been used at “The Mole”, but only because Mr Hall felt limited by the property’s location.

Cattle were raised mostly on the Macquarie Marshes’ water couch grasslands, which dominated most of the grazing country on “The Mole”. Steers being prepared for the feedlot grazed on forage oat crops.

Mr Hall, keen to reduce his production costs, believed Meat and Livestock Australia’s cost of-production calculator was a useful tool in this regard. As part of a cattle management plan, all male progeny are sold at the end of the year in which they were weaned – a decision driven by the fact the Halls had found their cattle did not gain much weight over summer. Mr Hall said it made more sense to turn the cattle off rather than have them essentially take food from the mouths of next year’s cow-and-calf units.

Early handling pays dividends

GETTING in early is the key to having a well-behaved herd, according to Garry and Leanne Hall, “The Mole”, Warren. Cattle are weaned at “The Mole” in February – at which point the Halls implemented what they describe as their most important management tool. They believed intensive management of cattle at weaning had a substantial impact on herd temperament and greatly improved stock handling.

In the past, weaning at “The Mole” involved yarding the weaners for four to five days before they were turned out – a practice employed by the Halls for 30 years. During the drought years, however, they started spending more time with the weaner cattle. For three to four weeks the weaners were given high exposure to horses, dogs and young children. They believed this instilled discipline in the cattle and made them easier to move as a mob later on. As a result, feeder steers were much calmer when being loaded, reducing transport losses. Mr Hall is pictured moving bulls recently.