

Newsletter 9

May 2008



Predictable, Functional Genetics....

Fertile, Gentle, Growthy & Adapted....

CBV Update

At the time of our last CBV newsletter we were walking around in mud. We are now walking around in dry grass and dust. Reality has arrived. Surprise, surprise, every year in the dry season it gets dry. As we start to order urea supplements and move cattle the escalating cost of necessary products are implanting themselves firmly in my head.

For a long time at CBV we have talked about low input cattle. Genetics that deliver with low cost every year. At \$2.00/kg store price and 7 percent interest this may not have meant much, but at \$1.55 store price and 9 percent interest it is starting to mean a hell of a lot.

We can not control the cost of the products we require, but we sure can control how much we produce off them. "Bang for buck" if you like.

As the ground dried out we preg tested; achieving an inspirational 90 percent over the whole company on four different properties. We expect to tag over 75 percent by October 15th and the last calf will be born by December 10th. The range was 87 percent to 94 percent between properties, and range between paddocks was 81 percent to 100 percent.

Amazing!! Good season, good management and good genetics working as one. All empty females are sold and only the working end of the herd are consuming grass. Grass this year is always at a premium, not to be wasted on empties. As we often state at CBV, search for the cattle that work well in the tough times, and the good times will take care of themselves. We are not getting big headed with these results as the one thing we can predict, is the unpredictability of the weather. There will be a few tough years around the corner to shake us back into reality.

The great rugby league coach Jack Gibson once said "Winning starts on Monday". Well it's Monday again for the production year so let's feel good about the win and work hard for another. Genetics and management are the two key factors that will continue to get us across the line so we must not let up on the intensity.

The CBV sale day is scheduled for 16th and 17th of July. Just to refresh, the 16th is for Open Nucleus contributors only and we invite everyone to join us for a meal and a yarn in the evening. This I personally really enjoy. CBV has a unique clientele and the group oozes wisdom and enthusiasm. The 17th is open sale day. The sale is not an auction sale so to find out more on the sale system please contact myself or one of the CBV team. On the back of the good season and the grass management of Carl and Judy Bain and family the bulls this year look excellent and have generations of powerful data to back them up.

CBV does not believe in feeding for sale days as the people who buy CBV genetics continually tell me they want real cattle to work in the real world so the best way to select them is under real conditions. I hear the comment from some cattlemen that they bought a bull and he let down into a good animal. What is this?? Let down? An animal that goes from grain fed and fat to grass fed and store? Who needs cattle that let down into good animals?? CBV bulls never let down; they breed and gain weight at the same time just like you expect of their progeny. Probably stating the obvious but it still amazes me how common this thinking is.

Hope to see you, and bring some friends to Tapnor in July.

Alf Collins Jr.

16th July 2008 - Wednesday

Open Nucleus Contributors

9:30am Smoko for 10am Start

RSVP—1st July 2008

We welcome our clients, their families and friends to dinner on night of 16th July (Wed.), at Coal 'n' Cattle Hotel, Moura.

**CBV
Bull Sale Days
2008**

17th July 2008 - Thursday

Open Sale Day

8am Start

Unable to Attend?

Alf Jr and/or Alf Sr are happy to select bulls on your behalf; please contact us. We may be able to arrange to have your bulls included on a truck to your area, from the sale days.

Two pieces of prose have been constant companions for most of my life. For me they have been treasures, and I would like to share them. I have been surprised by the number of people I have met who have not read them, and I am certain they are worth passing forward. I will share the second one in our next newsletter... With respect, Alf Collins Sr.

Desiderata - by Max Ehrmann 1872—1945

Go placidly amid the noise and haste,
And remember what peace there may be in silence.
As far as possible without surrender
be on good terms with all persons.
Speak your truth quietly & clearly;
and listen to others,
even the dull & ignorant;
they too have their story.

Avoid loud & aggressive persons,
they are vexations to the spirit.
If you compare yourself with others,
you may become vain & bitter;
for always there will be greater and lesser persons
than yourself.
Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans.

Keep interested in your own career, however humble;
it is a real possession in the changing fortunes of
time.
Exercise caution in your business affairs;
for the world is full of trickery.
But let this not blind you to what virtue there is;
many persons strive for high ideals;
and everywhere life is full of heroism.

Be yourself.

Especially, do not feign affection.
Neither be cynical about love;
for in the face of all aridity & disenchantment
it is perennial as the grass.

Take kindly the counsel of the years,
gracefully surrendering the things of youth.
Nurture strength of spirit to shield you in sudden
misfortune.
But do not distress yourself with imaginings.
Many fears are born of fatigue & loneliness.
Beyond a wholesome discipline,
be gentle with yourself.

You are a child of the universe,
no less than the trees & the stars;
you have a right to be here.
And whether or not it is clear to you,
no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.

Therefore be at peace with God,
whatever you conceive Him to be,
and whatever your labours & aspirations,
in the noisy confusion of life keep peace with your
soul.
With all its sham, drudgery & broken dreams,
it is still a beautiful world.

Be cheerful.

Strive to be happy.



All That Glitters is Not Necessarily Gold...

Between 10 and 20 years ago the CBV herd produced a series of first-cross Brahman / Bos Taurus progeny. Our aim was to breed an adapted composite breed, suitable for crossing with our other three lines of adapted and semi-adapted cattle. They were CBV Brahman, Boran, and Tuli.

At CBV we believed there was a need to develop and quantify a truly adapted composite, especially recognizing that there was no focus in current research, on the most important trait of reproduction, as well as survival in Northern Australia. Just two simple thoughts...

The CBV target was to supply genetics to our clients that could influence net efficiency and profit per hectare. We wanted to be able to supply proven genetics to generate hybrid vigour on a low-cost operational level. The proviso was, as always at CBV, a low maintenance level, assessed at high stocking rates and low support costs. No erosion of the fertile, gentle, growthy, and adapted principle.

The CBV Brahman herd was well established as an analytical base; by collaboration with Breedplan, CSIRO, and Gatton College (now University of Queensland).

Some of the CBV key disciplines are listed below.

- All progeny are weaned and depastured together for at least 18 months
- Constant measuring for puberty threshold, and weight
- Contemporary groups are large and long-term, often then mated together for some years
- Age at first calf, and calving intervals recorded on all females
- SDH (Stock days per hectare per 100 mm of rain) continues to be an important monitor, thanks to Terry McCosker of RCS and Alan Savory
- Kilograms per hectare of stock on hand and kilograms sold per hectare are recorded
- Average age of herd inventory is recorded annually
- Static mating dates, regardless of seasonal conditions, from 1 Oct to 21 Feb every summer
- Number of 'cow-days' exposure to mating for the entire herd

- Percentage of calf crop born is monitored by our reporting date of 31 October each year
- This reporting date has been wound back now to 15 October, since 1996

This management style ensures a solid basis for assessment.

From the late fifties I had read research articles from Netherlands, USA, and Australia, from roughly mid 1920's to mid 50's, extolling the virtues of F1 or first cross hybrids measured simply for weight gain, and when we looked at our first crosses from British breed cows there was no doubt about the big gains. What we did not know then was just how totally unsuited the hairy breeds (Bos Taurus) were, for tropical agriculture. With the knowledge we have now of Bos Indicus highly adapted breeds, I cannot help but marvel at our level of ignorance. Having first-hand knowledge of our own Brahmans now makes the previous Bos Taurus herds appear almost Neanderthal. I recall clearly the day in the early 50's when Mick Boyd spayed every Hereford cow my father owned, and Father's satisfaction to be stocking with Brahman blood. They were exciting times, and now of historic and economic significance.

Now, what was not in the literature was measurement of cost or quantity of inputs, and the most important parameter, of reproduction speed.

Fast forward to late 80's....

Our aim was to produce a highly adapted CBV composite with well recorded credentials for productivity. Brahmans at 'Belah Valley' had already set a course and were delivering genetics with integrity, so that was the foundation on which to build, and to make comparison by analysis and commercial earnings.

We generated some sets of F1 cattle, using Charolais, Simmental, Galloway and Angus, representing some excellent Bos Taurus stud herds.

Adaptaur, Tuli, Belmont Red, Brahmousin, and Boran were also used to try to infuse some of the breeds that had claimed to be adapted. This was a full range of non-adapted to semi-adapted sire lines, of diverse and unrelated genetics.

All That Glitters cont...

That was the easy bit. Bearing in mind that every year needs to be successful, not nine out of ten, or eight out of ten years, and that we need to average over **75% preg-test on time** to simply *replace* the herd without expansion, and then the challenges start to mount.

When we had our first couple of sets of resulting weaners they looked pretty ordinary. They were not doing well, rough coated and miserable. That was a very kind assessment. Bear in mind that several family members had doubts about the whole concept from the start, with some colourfully expressed sentiments. I needed to go for help. I phoned John Vercoe.

Two of the best men in tropical agriculture, Dr John Vercoe and Dr John Frisch from the CSIRO National Breeding Station drove to 'Belah Valley' quickly, surveyed the cattle, questioned our management, and concluded that I was unaware of part of their earlier research at Belmont. That was the 'effect of cumulative stresses on heterosis'.

They saw some humour in the situation, where I saw none. John Vercoe sent us a chart depicting this research, and I have carried it around sharing the information for the past 20 years. To me, this knowledge is still some of the most relevant for Australian cattle businesses, in my lifetime. I see lots of well intentioned crossbreeding exercises all over the country, globally actually, based more on stud breeders' ambition to sell bulls than any significant economic result in commercial beef returns. Naturally this concerns me, as these programs cost lots of cash, time, and effort, and yield long term disappointment.

The real purpose of management is to focus on what can be changed within our control, for a meaningful long-term return.

Well structured cross-breeding has many benefits, with the proviso that we must understand the level of stress that our herds endure, every year, and for what duration. Too easily we can see the potential gains of heterosis washed away by just two or three poor seasons in any ten years, or five to ten dry months in a year; or the cumulative effect of factors that on their own would be of small significance.

But when combined, they have real gravity.

I believe the importance is in knowing what factors impact on profit.

Some factors are:

- Ticks, worms, flies, heat, cold, humidity, lactation, excessive rain, long dry seasons, pasture digestibility, protein levels, mineral deficiencies, distance to water, and terrain.

We must have a practical method of quantifying these threats to our business; then have a plan.

None of these factors are of much threat on their own, but taken that in most typical years we can experience most of these stressors, then the cumulative effect can be devastating on expression of heterosis, or 'hybrid vigour'. A sobering thought is that all the heifers we breed need to be resilient enough to handle all the stresses that arise from our management and Nature, to keep their position in your herd for eight or ten years or more. That is with no gaps, no excuses, and no regrets.

At Belah Valley the most direct route to sort out all of the above is to require a weaned calf, plus a pregnancy, on our early schedule for every year of ownership. This is simple, decisive, and final.

Adaptation is no small subject, and it is the raft that northern Australian herds sail to success on.

The CSIRO research dealt only with the basic effects on growth. My observation has been that in the tropics, the cumulative effect of environmental stressors on **reproduction speed and efficiency** are even more profound than on growth. I am basing this on measuring sets of crossbred cattle for expression of puberty and reproduction speed, comparing body-weight and using contemporary CBV Brahmans for the base herd.

At all times the cross-breds and the comparative CBV Brahmans were weaned as one mob then grazed in the same mob for at least 18 months. From observations on four continents, certainly the nutrition levels and husbandry costs on research stations and universities are much higher than we choose to operate at, in our CBV herd. Undoubtedly the success of beef businesses in Australia will be decided by low input costs and speed of reproduction.

A Model that Depicts the Dependence of Heterosis on the Level of Environmental Stress (Growth Only)

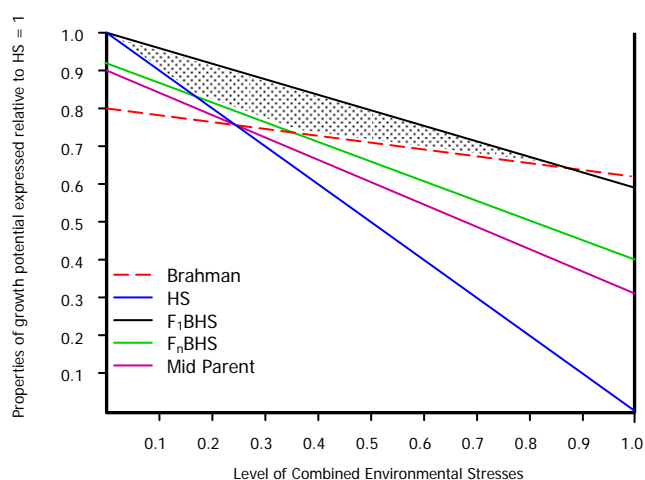


Figure 1 Diagrammatic representation of the G (genotype) x E (environment) for Bos Taurus (HS), Bos Indicus, the interbred cross (F₁BHS) and the F₂ cross (F₂BHS) showing the decline in proportion of production potential expressed as the combined level of environmental stress increases. The shaded area denotes heterosis in the F₁ when heterosis is defined as the increase over the better parent.
Source: Dr John Vercoe & Dr John Frisch, Ref. paper AJAS 1992 Vol.5 (No.3) p405

Point to ponder... "The free feed mentality" ... Where ever one travels, at field days, MLA/DPI/BIA forums, or on cattle properties, in a range of cultures, there are lots of questions about "silver bullet" technology, to deliver big returns for little effort. Often the speakers and marketers offer such bullets, especially at stud sales and promotions. Yet there are so very few 'free feeds' in reality. The only one that comes to my mind is rain. And you know how much influence we have on ordering that!! Hard gains are made by running hard yards, armed with well analyzed information.

Dr Joel Brown, noted rangeland scientist, was in a discussion group at CBV, solving land management challenges, and the group had wondered why so much time and money was spent on properties for very little gain chasing fashions and gimmicks. He drawled in his unique Kansas accent "You never go broke selling hope to farmers".

Heterosis has been offered as a quick fix too many times, without a full understanding of the factors affecting sound commercial results. The short term gains can easily be eroded by detrimental long term effects. Looking only at kilograms per head will disguise earnings per hectare, pregnancy rate per hectare, and growth per hectare, on a static time line on any rolling 10 year assessment. Heterosis is wonderful when you operate in a perfect world, yet fails dismally if you don't factor in the impact of cumulative stressors, in reality. To ignore natural resistances and adaptation is perilous at very least.

Fast forward to 2008...

At CBV the development of 'adapted composite' genetics still goes on. About sixteen percent of the breeding herd is dedicated to this, and the numbers bounce around a bit, depending on our successes at breeding and analyzing. I believe it is worthwhile, and the Brahman herd by comparison makes the competition pretty stiff. Our Brahmans have come a long way with significant gains in reproduction speed, survival rates, puberty threshold, speed of gain, and thrift. There was a time when the competition between our two genotypes was easier.

The CBV composite is now a far cry from where we started; now handling the stressors similarly to the rest of the herd. They are fertile, gentle natured, with sound growth rates, well fleshed, highly adapted, and often polled. Along the development trail there were plenty of casualties, some of that being lost income and time, in our commercial pursuits. Certainly we believe that 20 years of development imparts integrity to our composites genetics, and that we can save our clients lost time, capital, and opportunity with our rigorous CBV selection process.

Think globally, act locally....

Low costs and profit have been in every article I have written, and this season we have excellent illustration of these needs, with dopey cattle prices (www.cattlefacts.com.au/Index2.asp) and high costs, such as dry lick, infrastructure, fuel, transport, interest, and rations seeping over our balance sheet. Quite a lot of this is beyond our control, yet certainly there is plenty we can do right inside our own barb-wire. Management is the key to all our pursuits, and CBV genetics are icing on the cake. You cannot manage what you don't measure.

CBV manages and measures, to ensure integrity from our genetics to your herds.

The theme in the CBV Newsletters has been consistently reinforcing the need for vigilance on costs, margins, and sorting the substance from the shadow in cattle breeding systems.

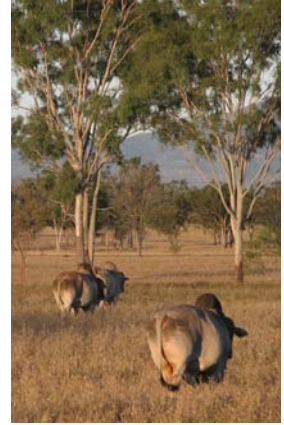
I am certainly advocating still the same... and more... vigilance and hard work. There is a lot of satisfaction in that, and a lot of fun.

Enjoy the fun of raising your families and your cattle...



***CBV Semen Sire Brochure
is available
Contact us for your copy...***

**“Make sure you buy your bulls from
someone who raises them like you ought to.”
(Kit Pharo, KS. USA)**



We would like to expand the contact list for our newsletter distribution. We would appreciate email or postal addresses of progressive and interested people.

Email: glennandvashti@activ8.net.au or Post to P.O. Box 416, Sarina, Qld, 4737.

...Thankyou, Vashti...

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