

# Spry's Genetics commercially focussed for Wongalina Station



Well-known Riverina agronomist, Don Kirkpatrick, "Maxwell Park", has used the highly successful genetic mix of Shorthorn and Angus for 18 years, cashing in on the benefits of hybrid vigour in a lucrative cross breeding operation

His low-maintenance herd had performed in tough times, turning cattle off at 460 to 480 kilograms live weight, returning \$950 late last year, due to the Angus//Shorthorn cross putting on weight off grass exclusively.

By gaining an average of two kilograms a day the steer and heifer progeny were turned off at 13 to 14 months. He said the key to success was in using the best genetics available from Spry's Shorthorns, which he

scrutinises the figures closely, especially 400-day weight gain.

"I use red Shorthorn bulls to get a black calf, through solid colour and rightly or wrongly you get a premium for black cattle," he said. "By using Angus and Shorthorn he said there were massive gains to be had from hybrid vigour."

The market acceptance of the Shorthorn/Angus cross gave him options when selling the progeny, straight to the feedlots, restocker or the sale yards

"At the end of the day, this works for me, it is a flexible cross that provides beef per hectare and that is where the profit is."

**COMMERCIAL** Shorthorn breeder John Goode has a simple breeding objective; to breed cattle adapted to the relatively short growing season of his coastal environment.

John and his wife Jan from Kingston, South Australia, are succeeding turning off steers which hit the heavy end of the European Union or MSA market at 20 months of age or younger with the influence of Spry's genetics.

Shorthorn cattle have been pride of place in the paddocks of Wangolina Station owned by the Goode family for around 80 years.

It is surrounded by sea on three sides and has an average annual rainfall of 640mm mainly between April and mid October.

John admits about a decade ago it was difficult to have their March-April drop calves finished by the end of the following year's growing season.

Rising levels of dystocia and the effect of pestivirus caused much thought as how to move forward to regain lost profitability.

Changing the breed was considered but that would not have countered the pestivirus problem.

In early 2003 Bob Gahan, the Shorthorn Breed Development officer at the time, suggested that the sire JR Legend be considered. JR Legend was imported by Spry's Shorthorns at Wagga Wagga, from the United States.

Since introducing the JR legend line the maturity pattern of their 300 cow herd had altered from large framed animals with high feed requirements to more moderate framed animals which, calve with more ease.

"Within 18 months we were seeing really encouraging signs and last year we had the best preg testing rate in many years ."

He says natural selection in the drought years in 2005, 2006 and 2007 really sorted out their females with those animals which were too late maturing really struggling to get enough fat cover to get in calf. Line breeding is not widely accepted in the beef industry but John is adamant using Legend siblings over each other has worked well breeding consistent lines of "true to type" steers and heifers for their self-replacing herd.

Over a number of generations the carcass shape and muscle and marbling of Legend have been stamped in his progeny. Increased carcass yield adds up to extra dollars and John says his steers are now achieving very high yields.

John praises Spry's stud principal Gerald Spry for his commercial approach to stud breeding and the change his genetics have had on Wangolina Station's ability to hit its target market.

"He has a great understanding of commercial traits and the profit drivers for commercial breeders," he said.

"He is really attuned to the commercial reality of the industry which some studs breeders aren't and really takes an interest in his clients," he said.

Nearly all of Wangolina Station's cattle are sold over the hooks to Teys Australia's plant at Naracoorte with the average carcass weight around 320 to 330 kilograms.

"We are hitting the good MSA boning groups with our cattle and it gives us great feedback and opens up a new marketing avenue."

"In the last draft we had 120 steers and none were under fat," he said.

**Words by Catherine Miller, Stock Journal, SA.**

*Photo: John Goode, Wangolina Station, Kingston says the use of the JR Legend sire line imported by Spry's Shorthorns has improved the calving ease of their herd and enabled them to hit their target EU and MSA market.*

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