

BASIC BEEF PRODUCTION

Activity 5

BREEDING BEEF

Beef has French touch

John Del Fabbro, Woolumbool, SA

A French connection is helping one south-east South Australian cattleman produce more beef more efficiently—and more profitably. With faster growth rates and lower fat scores he is turning his Limousin cross vealers off at least one month earlier than other stock and for more money.

To say that John Del Fabbro, 'Alaman', Woolumbool, is pretty happy with the French bloodline he is infusing in his herd would be an understatement. 'The young Limousin cross calves grow quickly, dress out well with very little fat and weigh like lead,' Mr Del Fabbro says.

'My cash return from these calves is usually between \$20 and \$30 a head more than I can get for other stock which I have to carry for an extra four to six weeks,' he adds.

Mr Del Fabbro started his own Limousin breeding program on 'Alaman' in 1975, buying two pure bulls to put over his Shorthorn cows. Today the breeding herd split is about 50 pc Shorthorn and 50 pc in various stages of Limousin cross. The pure Shorthorns are either put to Shorthorn bulls to breed replacement breeders or to three-quarter Limousin bulls to produce vealers.

'Using the Shorthorn blood as a base for the crossing process I find I can sell the calves straight off their mothers much quicker than I can the pure lines,' he says. 'The Limousin crosses grow out beautifully on their mothers and are in saleable condition in about nine months.

'I'm using the Limousin for their ability to produce lean meat and find I get the best results from three-quarter Limousin bulls because their calves are not too far away from the traditional beef type of animal.

'I'm sticking to the Shorthorn blood with the cows to obtain the first cross breeder and hybrid vigor in the calves. The Limousin produces a nice stretchy animal while the crossing adds length and depth. I believe the first cross cow is genetically better and produces a better calf when crossed back with three quarter Limousin bull.

'And I'm convinced this mating practice produces the type of vealer I can make the most money from and I'm really not interested in taking the Limousin side any further.'

Each year Mr Del Fabbro keeps back a selected number of calves as replacement first cross breeders and about 60 steer vealers for growing out. 'I usually sell these as two-year-olds in June and find this extra cash flow at that time very handy,' he says. 'But the big money from our cattle comes through being able to turn off our Limousin cross vealers early.' He sells his vealers on the hooks claiming he's too busy to go to markets.

To back up his belief that he was making more money from his Limousin cross vealers, Mr Del Fabbro recently trace checked a consignment of 65 mixed sex vealers bought by a meat processing works. The consignment was made up of 31 vealers from three-quarter Limousin bulls out of half-bred cows and 34 from three-quarter Limousin bulls out of pure Shorthorn cows.

The steers in the consignment with the extra 25 pc Limousin blood returned an extra 9 kg dressed weight or nearly \$20 a head based on the price at the time of \$1.93 kg. The weights for the heifers were almost identical.

According to abattoirs reports, the fat score for the whole consignment averaged 6.7 mm and the average dress out percentage was 55.5 pc with the steers dressing out at 207 kg and heifers at 189 kg. 'I was delighted with the result because it means I was paid \$384.76 a head for the calves straight off their mothers and in the paddock,' Mr Del Fabbro says.

*Farming the Australian Way, The Land
Publication, 1988 p. 69*

Read the article above on beef cattle.

1. What type of beef cattle is this farmer producing?
2. Why does this farmer use Limousin and Shorthorn cattle in breeding?
3. What factors do you think affect the production levels this farmer gets?
4. Make a list of what you think the farmer's goals are.
5. Do you think these goals are shared by other beef producers? Explain.