

Bonsmara: new era for the north

By **PENELOPE ARTHUR**

THE Australian Agricultural College Corporation (AACC) has joined the growing list of respected beef operations throughout northern Queensland using Bonsmara genetics to improve production, without compromising adaptive traits.

Bonsmara has been the dominant beef breed in South Africa for many decades but it's only been in recent years that the breed has begun to capture the attention of beef producers in Australia.

Now large pastoral companies such as the Australian Agricultural Company (AAco), who purchased 110 Yarra Bonsmara bulls in late 2011, have turned to the tropically adapted breed for traits such as fertility, meat quality, tick resistance and temperament.

On the eve of Australia's largest beef event, Beef Australia, *Queensland Country Life's* Penelope Arthur sat down with AACC production manager, Peter Scott, to discuss what attracted him to the Bonsmara breed.

Bonsmara delivers benefits in AACC herd

The AACC run 800 Bonsmara, Belmont Red and Senepol composite breeders on the Corporation's main beef property, Berrigurra, Blackwater.

Production manager, Peter Scott, said Bonsmara genetics had been used in the herd since 2006 and had been introduced to deliver better tick resistance, meat quality, fertility and temperament.

"It was important that our herd be tropically adapted to give us animals with nice, loose skin and good tick resistance," he said.

"We also wanted to combine that with traits such as meat quality, fertility and temperament – all of which the Bonsmara breed can deliver."

"Because we have students working with cattle, temperament is a major consideration for us and we also know that temperament is closely linked to meat quality."

The AACC have been able to repeatedly prove the quality of their Bonsmara cross product through the hotly contested Callide Dawson Carcase Competition.

In 2011, the AACC won Champion Grassfed Heifer Carcase, Reserve Champion Grassfed Heifer Carcase and placed equal first for the best liveweight gain in the feedlot, recording an average daily gain of 2.87kg/day.

They also placed second and third in the trade steer or heifer class and third in the single export heifer class.

The AACC also looked well placed for the 2012 Callide Dawson Carcase Competition which has just passed the mid-way point.

At 50-days on grain, their Bonsmara cross steers were recording average daily weight gains of up to 3.24kg/day.

Mr Scott said these results reflected the strong performance of the Bonsmara cross steers in the AACC feedlot.

"We put around 240 steers through the Emerald Ag College feedlot for training each year and they are sold into the Jap Ox market and usually grade at the top of the grid," he said.



The Bonsmara / Red Brahman cross is working well in northern herds.

We wanted to combine tropical adaptation with traits such as meat quality, fertility and temperament - all of which the Bonsmara breed can deliver

Mr Scott said using Bonsmara genetics had shortened the joining period of the AACC herd.

"Over the past couple of years we have been using pelvic measurements to select our replacement heifers and then joining them to Bonsmara bulls as yearlings," he said.

"By doing that we have significantly reduced calving difficulties in our heifers."

"We have continued to buy high growth bulls for our cows but have selected bulls with more moderate growth EBVs for the heifers."

"Our pregnancy rate has also improved in recent years and is now always in the high 90 percentile."

See Yarra Bonsmara at Beef 2012

The Bonsmara breed will have a point to prove when it goes up against some of Queensland's biggest breeds in its first appearance at the Ruralco/CRT Australian Beef Cattle Championships at Beef Australia next month.

Australia's largest Bonsmara producer, Yarra Bonsmara, will enter eight pens of purebred and crossbred Bonsmara steers in the grainfed section of the prime cattle competition.

It's a bold step for the emerging breed but Yarra Bonsmara manager, Tony Berry, believes the steers will hold their own against some of the better known breeds.

"I'm quietly confident the steers will perform well at Rockhampton," he said.

"We've had terrific results in other national competitions such as the Beef 2009 National Carcase Competition where we received the Reserve Champion ribbon for a Pen of Three Export Chiller Bullocks and second highest retail meat yield."

"Bonsmara carcasses hang up very well and that's paramount at this level of competition."

Yarra Bonsmara will also host an indoor trade site (Site 31) at the Genetics and Reproduction Technologies Marketplace and an outdoor site (Site 112) in Rib Eye Lane at Beef 2012.

A mixture of purebred and crossbred Bonsmara cattle will be on display at Site 112.

'Bonsmara hour' will be held at their outdoor site every day between 3 and 4pm, with complimentary refreshments and canapés on offer, as well as a daily prize draw.

With properties at Beaudesert and Gogango, Yarra Bonsmara aims to produce around 100 sale bulls annually.

The stud received a major boost in November last year when the Australian Agricultural Company (AAco) purchased 110 Bonsmara bulls to use in its composite breeding programs across northern Australia.

AAco's Chief Operating Officer Troy Setter said AAco had used limited Bonsmara genetics in its composite breeding program previously and had been impressed by the progeny of the Bonsmara bulls.

"We already had some Bonsmara bulls on properties in the Northern Territory where they are being run with Brahman cows," he said.



A purebred Yarra Bonsmara bull typical of the type that attracted AACC and AAco to the Bonsmara breed.

"The results we have achieved with that program gave us the confidence to source another 110 Yarra Bonsmara bulls late last year."

"We believe they will bring hybrid vigour with their African outcross and will provide increased red meat yield to our Brahman cattle."

"We also believe the addition of Bonsmara genetics will assist in the improvement of fertility in our Brahman cattle."

"Bonsmara handle the ticks well in the Northern Territory and cross well with our Brahman cows."

• Part 4 of 4.

BEF 2012




Yarra Bonsmara
Tropically Adapted Power

You are invited to the
BONSMARA DOMAIN

SITE #31 - Genetics & Reproduction Technologies Marketplace

SITE #112 - Rib Eye Lane

- Purebred and crossbred Bonsmara cattle on display • Enter our daily prize draw!
- Bonsmara hour 3-4pm daily - complimentary refreshments and canapés

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