

2000/Q03



Producer Research Support

Meeting Live Export Markets

Cape York Peninsula Live Export Group



The project

The Cape York Peninsula Live Export Group (CYPLEG) designed a program to look at the benefits of different supplementary feeding regimes to build steer weights to meet export targets.

Objectives

1. Reach target weight for age (300 kilograms) in live export steers by enhancing wet season steer growth;
2. CYPLEG members to exceed live export specifications by June 2002; and
3. Increase wet season growth of yearling and two year old steers to at least 100 kg.

What was done?

The project was run at three separate locations. Supplementary feed was provided to steers and average weight changes recorded for the wet and dry seasons.

Details on the ages of trial steers, type and volume of supplementary feed provided, composition of grazing paddocks and relative performance against control groups was either not recorded, or not provided as part of the final project report.

What happened?

2001 Results

Average wet season gains at two of the test locations were lower than expected, at only 0.5 kilograms per day. At the third location, average weight gains during this time were only 0.25 kilograms per day. Wet season correlations between live weight changes, and live weight at the start of the period are positive. It seems that on average, heavier steers put on more weight than light steers.

The same two locations showed dry season live weight losses of 0.1 kilograms per day when supplementary feed was provided. The third location achieved live weight gains of the same amount. Dry season correlations between live weight changes and live weight at the start of the period are all negative. On average, heavier steers lost more weight than light steers.

Dry season live weight changes are more variable than wet season changes, suggesting the possibility of uneven supplement intake.

The Cape York Peninsula Live Export Group (CYPLEG) provided steers at different trial locations with wet season supplementary feeding, to build steer weights to meet export targets.

The project failed to meet its targets of 300 kilograms steer live weight at two and a half years, or animal growth of 100 kilograms.

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2002 Results

Wet season live weight gains were even better than the previous year at one of the locations, but poorer at both other sites. This is assumed to be due to paddocking conditions, but details have not been provided.

Cattle were weighed in July, rather than at the start of the wet season. It is proposed, but was not verified with data, that live weight gains would have been higher early in the wet season.

Variability of live weight gains is low, suggesting that supplement intake is quite low. Response to HGP was small but consistent and therefore not considered to be cost effective.

Correlations between live weight gains in 2002 and live weight at the start of the wet season were low, demonstrating that steers gained similar weights over the period, regardless of starting weights.

Discussion

Without using un-supplemented control groups, the benefits of supplementary feeding during the wet season cannot be quantified.

Wet season live weight gains were modest, averaging 72 kilograms per steer, with a range of 33 to 103 kilograms. In other regions of Northern Australia, wet season live weight gains range from 100 to 150 kilograms, depending on natural soil fertility.

These low live weight gains could be related to paddock conditions. Steers with restricted pasture aren't able to grow quickly and don't respond to supplementary feeding.

Next steps

Details on the project background and methods used were not provided. Control herds that didn't receive any supplementary feeding were not kept, which made it difficult to determine the relative benefits of supplementary feeding, and which feeds were most efficient.

In order for the objectives of this project to be more robustly measured, details about the methodology would be required. A control group of steers grazed on the same paddocks without supplementary feeding would also be required.