

96/N12



Producer Research Support

Hill country pastures lift carrying capacity

Nowendoc Landcare Group



The project

An alliance between the Te Mania Angus stud in Victoria and a group of commercial beef breeders is redefining genetic improvement for the production of high-value beef.

The vertically integrated breeding program includes the supply of elite genetics at discount prices to commercial members, with carcass and management feedback directing the breeding program of the stud.

Coordinated marketing of slaughter progeny adds another dimension to the program. A consistent line of cattle is marketed to lot feeders and processors. Carcass data is then used in genetic evaluations.

The idea of the alliance - Team Te Mania - is to maintain the "correct direction" in genetic improvement through a close association with commercial breeders and other sectors of the beef production chain. This ensures feedback on the suitability of the genetics for commercial production. The alliance also provides a framework for progeny testing potential sires.

The Producer Research Support project was begun to refine the design of the alliance, develop feedback from lot feeders and processors and establish a progeny test regime.

Objectives

1. Establish performance criteria in all sectors of the production chain that will predict performance of cattle through to carcass; and
2. Set-up a system of feedback that can be used to monitor performance at the management and genetic level.

What was done

Team Te Mania now has 17 cooperator herds running a combined herd of about 7,000 cows. Te Mania Angus makes available semen at \$8 a straw and the option to lease bulls for \$1,500 dollars a year.

Team members are encouraged to use AI to form the across herd linkage and to genetically benchmark the herds. Four of these herds are participating as full progeny test herds. All have used AI to create linkage across team Te Mania and with other Angus Group BREEDPLAN herds. Most herds are single sire joining.

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Key points

- Team Te Mania should continue to operate the model for data collection and feedback. This would enable all members of the alliance to employ continued genetic improvement.
- With efficient data collection the genetic potential of relatively young animals can be assessed with reasonable accuracy. The Team should now exploit the value of BREEDPLAN EBVs and BreedObject selection indexes to select young sires for progeny tests. This refinement will accelerate genetic progress.
- Commercial breeders within the team should be encouraged to keep up-to-date with the genetic progress and choose sires that will increase profitability based on sound genetic principles, including BreedObject indexes. The result would be a more profitable production system and a product more suited to market requirements.

Discussion

Carcase merit

Team Te Mania member Keith McFarlane, Wellington Lodge, Taillem Bend, SA, said participation in the Producer Research Support Project allowed him to enter the modern breeding world of scanning for carcass merit.

"It gave us a new dimension in carcass assessment while animals are still alive. This is such a great advancement and has resulted in us becoming more focused in what we're trying to do."

He said placing steers for longfeeding for Japan higher value B3 market through the Team Te Mania program had given them access to improved feedback.

"We hope to get to the stage where through scanning we can draft off the steers with a propensity to marble and retain ownership through to the box," Mr McFarlane said.

"The rest will be directed into CAAB (the Angus breeds own branded beef program).

"This puts us at a huge advantage because it takes the guess work out of marketing."

The value of feedback has been enhanced by the use of information from team members to design BreedObject selection indexes that in turn direct the breeding program of the seedstock herd. BreedObject has been designed to collect economically important production and product quality data and use it to calculate weightings for the BREEDPLAN EBVs that will maximise profit. The two most important traits are 600 day weight and percentage intramuscular fat.

"The genetic improvement in this program is being driven by commercial reality," Mr Upton said.

Team Te Mania members already seeing benefits from the system. More young bulls are being accurately evaluated which increases the opportunities for herd improvement. Remember that the team members get first pick of the Te Mania genetics. A search of the Angus society sire selector (Spring 99 EBVs) for 1994 drop sires with an accuracy greater than 70% for the intra-muscular fat EBV (one objective measure of marbling which is used in beef quality grading schemes) found 12 sires. Seven of these were Te Mania sires. No other herd had greater than one sire with high accuracy EBVs.



MLA also recommends BeefPlan

BeefPlan is a non-traditional approach to learning. Groups of like-minded beef producers, work together as a management team to focus on property management. Importantly the learning agenda is set and controlled by the group.

Contact Steve Banney - Project Coordinator

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July 2006 / PIRD OUTCOMES

Unique programs

Mr Upton, who worked with Team Te Mania on the project, said the design and administration of the program was a unique undertaking in the beef industry.

"The project had the efficient production of high quality beef as the main objective and involved all key sectors in the decision making process," he said.

Mr Upton said members of Team Te Mania benefited by the better application of genetic technologies and the educational activities that arose from participating in the group.

These activities had also resulted in changes to marketing and nutritional practice.

"This program has developed an industry model that if adopted by other groups in the industry will result in much greater uptake of technology."

The group dynamics of Team Te Mania was one of the strengths which had been fostered by regular communications and bi-annual seminars held in conjunction with bull selection days. These group activities contributed to the cohesive approach to genetic improvement, a vastly improved knowledge of nutritional requirements and an understanding of marketing.

"This approach is an ideal model for other groups within the beef industry to use for education, as well as improved profitability," Mr Upton said.

"The coordinated marketing is also promoting the value of improved genetics and nutrition to lotfeeders and processors and will have spin-offs for others in the industry who adopt these technologies as well as the Team Te Mania members."

One of the strengths of this alliance is the number of similarly bred commercial cattle available to lotfeeders and processors.

Attracting commercial interest

The project had, as one of its primary goals, to attract commercial interest in the resulting progeny. A marketing coordinator was employed by the group to market progeny to the best advantage and be responsible for the follow-up and retrieval of data from feedlots and processors. This cost is met from a marketing fee.

Genetic direction for the Team Te Mania is delivered by a consultancy with the AGBU. Under contract from Team Te Mania, AGBU assists the program by analysing feedback, calculating selection indexes and providing support to the design of the breeding program.

Commercial membership of Team Te Mania continues to grow and the data from the feedlots and processors is beginning to flow.

Mr Upton said information was the key to uniting an alliance such as this and the biannual meetings of the team had been a major venue for ensuring that members were well informed and had a say in the operation. The information imparted to the members was not limited to the operation of the genetic package and included nutritional best practice and forums on marketing.