



final report

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Prepared by: Gabrielle Sheehan
Currie Communications Pty Ltd

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Grain Fed Finished (GFF) standard implementation: writing project

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Abstract

The project included the production of articles to help introduce the new Grain Fed Finished (GFF) Standard to audiences, particularly lotfeeders, as outlined in the GFF Standard implementation plan.

Currie worked with the Australian Lot Feeders' Association (ALFA) to develop themes for the articles, identify industry spokespeople to feature, and to refine the articles.

Executive summary

The project included the creation of engaging articles to help introduce the new Grain Fed Finished (GFF) Standard to audiences, as outlined in the GFF Standard implementation plan.

Currie worked with the Australian Lot Feeders' Association (ALFA) to develop themes for the articles, identify industry spokespeople to feature, and to refine the articles.

Currie wrote six articles of various lengths including longer articles that could be used in the *Lot Feeding Journal* and shorter articles for the ALFA newsletter and MLA Quarterly Feed e-Newsletter, which were provided in line with the agreed-on schedule.

Activities included:

- Research
- Interviewing Jim Cudmore, Tess Herbert, Ian King, Sarah Strachan
- Drafting three 1000-word articles based on these interviews, editing in line with feedback, for use in industry publications
- Developing three 600-word articles

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1 Background

From 1 September 2018, the National Feedlot Accreditation Scheme (NFAS) included a new standard, Grain Fed Finished (GFF), for beef from cattle fed a high energy ration in an NFAS-accredited facility for a minimum of 35 days and that meet all Meat Standards Australia (MSA) grading requirements.

2 Project objectives

Develop communication resources to support the introduction of the new Grain Fed Finished (GFF) Standard to feedlot industry stakeholders.

The project will assist industry to understand the new standard and its potential benefits.

3 Methodology

The project included the creation of engaging articles to help introduce the new Grain Fed Finished (GFF) Standard to audiences, as outlined in the GFF Standard implementation plan.

Currie worked with the Australian Lot Feeders' Association (ALFA) to develop themes for the articles and identify industry spokespeople to feature. Jim Cudmore, Tess Herbert, Ian King, Sarah Strachan were selected as these spokespeople.

Currie's interviews with these four people informed six articles of various lengths including longer articles that used in the *Lot Feeding Journal* and shorter articles for the ALFA newsletter and MLA Quarterly Feed eNewsletter.

A publishing schedule was confirmed with ALFA's Manager - Membership, Communications & Capability, Madie Hamilton, to ensure all deadlines were met.

Currie worked with the nominated subjects to set up times for the interviews, conducted the interviews and drafted the articles. Following drafting, Currie coordinated approvals with subjects and ALFA, editing copy in line with feedback to produce the final version.

Activities have included:

- Research
- Interviewing
- Drafting three 1000-word articles based on these interviews, editing in line with feedback, for use in industry publications
- Developing three 600-word articles

4 Results

The six articles were informative, factually accurate and delivered on time. They were reproduced in key industry publications which are effective channels to the target audience.

5 Key messages

- From 1 September 2018, the National Feedlot Accreditation Scheme (NFAS) has included the standard, Grain Fed Finished (GFF), for beef from cattle fed a high energy ration in an NFAS-accredited facility for a minimum of 35 days and that meet all Meat Standards Australia (MSA) grading requirements.
- This new standard helps meet demand for beef produced for specific eating quality.
- The new standard's name Grain Fed Finished (GFF) accurately describes the resulting product.
- Refinements in grain processing, ration formulation and feed distribution coupled with genetic improvements of Australia's beef cattle herd has brought enormous advancements in grain fed beef production since the mid-1990s.
- The Australian Lot Feeders' Association (ALFA) developed the GFF standard in consultation with feedlot operators, processors, retailers and brand owners. ALFA also worked closely with industry representative bodies through the Australian Meat Industry Language and Standards Committee to develop the standard. Additional work with AUS-MEAT and the Federal Department of Agriculture and Water Resources focused on ensuring GFF is included in Australia's trade description language and relevant export legislation.
- The new standard has technical specifications, including a minimum number of days on a high-energy ration and MSA grading eligibility.

6 Appendix

6.1 ALFA GFF Project: Article 1 – Jim Cudmore (1000 words)

Grain Fed Finished beef a natural extension of product range

Introducing a third standard for grain fed beef is a sensible evolution for lotfeeding in Australia, Feedlot Industry Accreditation Committee (FLIAC) chair Jim Cudmore says.

From 1 September the National Feedlot Accreditation Scheme (NFAS) will include a new standard, Grain Fed Finished (GFF), for beef from cattle fed a high energy ration in an NFAS-accredited facility for a minimum of 35 days and that meet all Meat Standards Australia (MSA) grading requirements.

“All of industry – not just the grain fed industry – is now producing for specific eating quality outcomes,” Mr Cudmore said.

“The addition of the GFF Standard to the NFAS is working towards satisfying that demand. It’s a sensible evolution of the NFAS to involve a standard that specifically relates to an eating quality outcome.”

GFF will be included alongside the existing Grain Fed (GF) beef and Grain Fed Young (GFYG) beef as a product of the NFAS. The additional standard will be included in the NFAS Rules and Standards and AUS-MEAT Language from 1 September 2018.

The Australian Lot Feeders’ Association and FLIAC chose the name GFF for the new standard to expand the current grain fed offering and accurately describe the resulting product.

“We certainly wanted to include ‘Grain Fed’ in the description, and decided that ‘Grain Fed Finished’ accurately represented the product. With the specification including fewer days on feed, Grain Fed Finished indicates to the market that the animal has been finished on a dedicated grain feeding regime,” Mr Cudmore said.

Refinements in grain processing, ration formulation and feed distribution coupled with genetic improvements of Australia’s beef cattle herd has brought enormous advancements in grain fed beef production since the mid-1990s.

“Over the last two decades the genetic base of the cattle we’re feeding has improved greatly so that an animal that may have had to have been fed, for example, for 120 or 130 days to get a certain eating quality outcome in 1995 has the genetic capacity today to achieve it much earlier.

“At the same time, our feeding systems have dramatically improved as we’ve learnt to target feed diets to specific groups of cattle.

“The industry has improved and the cattle have improved, so we can now do things today in a shorter timeframe and still achieve the same eating quality outcomes, or even better.

“Back in 1994-95, when the NFAS was first introduced, the two original standards – Grain Fed (GF) and Grain Fed Young Beef (GFYG) – were the minimum standards for grain fed beef within the scheme and were built on AUS-MEAT grading and the best available science at the time. They have

stood the test of time well and continue to be widely acclaimed commercially as delivering high quality grain fed beef.”

“Now, of course, with MSA we have tools to scientifically describe beef products on an eating quality basis, and so to some degree, the days on feed under the MSA grading system are less relevant.”

Mr Cudmore said one of the key features of GFF would be the integrity provided by the NFAS production system and the positive connotations that could be attached to its beef products.

Having GFF available as a standard will enhance flexibility right along the value chain, from producers, lotfeeders and processors through to category or brand owners, while continuing to ensure product integrity and guaranteed eating quality.

“It adds flexibility in supply so that if a brand owner says ‘My customer doesn’t really care whether the cattle have had 70 days or 58 days on feed as long as the end product delivers on quality’, the brand can still provide that outcome. It also allows brand owners to include a variation in their offering not necessarily bolted to days on feed but still underpinned by the NFAS production system.”

The GFF Standard is being introduced in addition to the existing grain fed standards. Importantly Grain Fed (GF) and Grain Fed Young Beef (GFYG) standards will not change.

“Industry recognises the importance of the existing standards and their widespread use commercially in describing and trading Grain Fed beef and their significant importance in underpinning brand offerings. Consequently, these standards will continue to be available as they are without change.”

The Australian Lot Feeders’ Association (ALFA) developed the GFF standard in consultation with feedlot operators, processors, retailers and brand owners. ALFA also worked closely with industry representative bodies through the Australian Meat Industry Language and Standards Committee to develop the standard. Additional work with AUS-MEAT and the Federal Department of Agriculture and Water Resources focused on ensuring GFF is included in Australia’s trade description language and relevant export legislation.

Technical specifications for the new GFF standard were based on utilising the NFAS, a high-energy ration for a minimum number of days on feed and MSA grading eligibility. The specifications are:

- **NFAS:** Eligible cattle must be produced in an NFAS accredited feedlot in accordance with the NFAS Rules and Standards.
- **Number of days on feed:** Minimum 35 days (same for males* and females).
- **Feed ration:** The cattle must have been fed in an accredited feedlot for not less than 35 days, and for not less than 28 days of that, on a nutritionally balanced ration of a recognised high energy feed of which grain is the highest single component. Rations must have an average metabolisable energy (ME) content greater than 10 megajoules (MJ) per kilogram of dry matter.
- **MSA:** Meet all Meat Standards Australia (MSA) grading requirements at production and meat processing to be eligible as GFF product.

*Castrate males (steers) only.

The minimum 35 days on feed is the approximate time that the prescribed fat colour attribute associated with Grain Fed beef occurs based on science. It is also compliant with the MSA on-farm production requirements for the number of days cattle must reside on a property to be MSA eligible. Finally, the minimum number of days will enable feedlot managers and brand owners to manage the cost of gain which is especially important in times of high grain prices and relevant to the current trading conditions.

Adoption of the GFF standard from 1 September 2018 will be a voluntary and commercial decision between brand owners, meat processors, non-packer exporters and NFAS-accredited feedlot operators who supply them. NFAS accredited feedlots, AUS-MEAT accredited beef establishments and Non-Packer Exporters have received advice on how to adopt the new standard into commerce. Mr Cudmore said GFF would most likely slot into the product hierarchy below long-fed Wagyu and GF and GFYG beef.

At least one major supermarket and several brand owners have expressed interest in GFF beef and it is expected they will closely monitor the public's response once it is released into the marketplace, Mr Cudmore said.

For more information about the new GFF standards or how to implement it, contact ALFA on (02) 9290 3700 or info@feedlots.com.au.

A detailed fact sheet is also available on the ALFA website at <http://www.feedlots.com.au/>

6.2 ALFA GFF Project: Article 2 – Tess Herbert (1000 words+)

Same quality assurance underpins new Grain Fed Finished beef

Being a product of the National Feedlot Accreditation Scheme (NFAS) will give additional credibility to Australia's latest grain-fed red meat, Grain Fed Finished (GFF) beef.

From 1 September lot feeders now have the option of feeding cattle under a newly introduced third NFAS grain-fed beef standard. This requires livestock to be fed a grain ration for a minimum of 35 days and that their carcasses grade under MSA (Meat Standards Australia) at the processing facility.

It builds on the suite of products established in the mid-1990s with Grain Fed (GF) beef (fed for 100 days) and Young Grain Fed (GFYG) beef (60 days for heifers or 70 days for steers).

"We've always seen ourselves as a finishing system. Our cattle spend most of their lives on grass and we finish the product off on a highly nutritious grain ration," Australian Lot Feeders Association (ALFA) president Tess Herbert said.

"Importantly, product that meets the GFF standard will be 'certified' Grain Fed Finished beef as it will be produced in an accredited feedlot with all of the checks and balances that come under the NFAS. This gives the production of GFF beef a lot more rigour than, say, grain feeding cattle in a paddock in an unaccredited environment.

"The feedlot industry has a strong accreditation system with standards around animal welfare, the environment and product integrity. The NFAS, with its independent third-party annual audit, is the cornerstone of grain-fed beef production in this country. Adding the shorter days-on-feed standard allows lot feeders to have cattle in for 35 days but still adhere to those high NFAS standards.

"That's a significant advantage: having shorter-fed cattle but still having the existing integrity of the accreditation system sitting behind the end product – especially as customers become more discerning and increase demand for livestock produced under high welfare and environmental practices," Mrs Herbert said.

Mrs Herbert said the second major bonus of the shorter feeding period was the flexibility it would offer lot feeders as grain prices fluctuated.

"The cost of grain is likely to be one of the market drivers," she said.

"It won't be the only one, particularly since many feedlots have sophisticated hedging systems in place, but cost will certainly be part of their thinking if they're having difficulty procuring grain in times of shortage and variable price."

Mrs Herbert said she anticipated operators who were currently feeding grain but were unable to have their product certified as either GF or GFYF because it was fed shorter-term could be among early adopters of the new standard.

"There are lot feeders who have up until now been sending cattle out from fewer days on feed under [an NFAS Delivery Docket] Form B. Their product hasn't been able to be called Grain Fed beef

because they haven't been feeding for the required number of days, but this third standard may fill that gap for them and allow them to use a Form A instead from now on."

She said improvements in both beef cattle genetics and grain-feeding science had combined to reduce the length of feeding required to produce an excellent eating quality outcome.

"We can see in the MSA compliance figures that the standard has been rising over time. The percentage of cattle now grading MSA is increasing, which shows that the eating quality of cattle in Australia is improving."

Mrs Herbert said the introduction of the GFF standard was instigated by ALFA on behalf of its membership.

"The concept of a third standard was first flagged in a review of NFAS conducted in 2014–15 and then ALFA made a decision two years ago to progress the concept of a third standard through wide industry consultation."

"The NFAS review paved the way to look at the existing standards with fresh eyes and built on the existing suite of grain fed beef standards by introducing a third based on fewer days on feed and MSA science."

Mrs Herbert said comments about GFF made to her by lot feeders to date had been entirely positive.

"All of the feedback we've had from members has been congratulating us on discussing and then implementing this third standard."

She said throughout the development process ALFA had consulted closely with stakeholders across the grain-fed beef industry, including at the commercial and industry levels.

"This consultation indicated to us that the supply chain was interested in the concept and gave us the confidence that the market was looking for this type of product and the flexibility it brings to the supply chain," Mrs Herbert said.

"With the standard now introduced we're seeing encouraging signs that the interest we saw in the development stage will translate to cattle on feed and exiting under the new 35-day standard."

She said adoption of the GFF standard would occur progressively and would be driven largely by processors.

"Ultimately, the success of the GFF standard lies with brand owners and their ability to build a product offering that appeals to their customer base and the consumer. Potentially it could bring more cattle into our NFAS-accredited feedlots but it really does depend on the season, the market and customer demand," Mrs Herbert said.

Mrs Herbert said her family's two feedlots, Gundamain near Eugowra in the Central West of NSW and Ladysmith near Wagga Wagga in the Riverina, would begin producing GFF cattle if their customer requested that.

“We’ll be directed by our customer; they’ll be telling us whether or not they want this third standard.”

The Herberts’ business evolved from a practice of paddock-feeding grain to cattle established by Mrs Herbert’s husband, Andrew, and his father, Don, in the 1970s. Together, Gundmain and Ladysmith are now one of Australia’s biggest family-owned lot feeding operations.

She said communication to support the new standard beyond its introduction would be ongoing.

“We’ll be talking about it regularly in our fortnightly newsletter, Around the Pens, and in ALFA Lotfeeding journal, and at workshops and conferences. We’ll also be talking about it to Meat & Livestock Australia so that they’re aware of it in their communications to their chefs. “AUS-MEAT auditors responsible for accrediting NFAS feedlots have been briefed, and ALFA’s technical services officer, Jeff House, who visits feedlots, will be ensuring individual owners understand the standard. We also have some great information available on our website,” she said.

Mrs Herbert said few, if any, changes would be required at the feedlot level.

“All of the same NFAS standards still apply and so there is no additional work or cost involved in producing cattle under the GFF standard as it relates to the NFAS.”

For more information about the new GFF standard or how to implement it, contact ALFA on (02) 9290 3700 or info@feedlots.com.au.

A detailed fact sheet is also available on the ALFA website at <http://www.feedlots.com.au/>

6.3 ALFA GFF Project: Article 3 – Ian King, Sarah Strachan (1000+ words)

GFF take-up under way

Lot feeders are gearing up to produce their industry's newest product – Grain Fed Finished (GFF) beef.

As the independent body responsible for auditing National Feedlot Accreditation Scheme (NFAS) accredited feedlots, AUS-MEAT has been a pivotal player in the new standard's rollout.

The GFF Standard was launched on 1 September this year and by the third week of October AUS-MEAT CEO Ian King said "an encouraging number of lot feeders" had placed orders for the updated version of the paperwork which will in time allow them to consign GFF-eligible cattle.

"AUS-MEAT is not aware whether any animals have been processed as GFF at this stage. However, we have supplied revised NFAS delivery documentation, as the essential declaration, to approximately 30 feedlots to date," Mr King said on 22 October.

That figure represents just under eight per cent of the scheme's approximately 400 members.

Under the GFF standard any livestock presented for slaughter must have been fed for the minimum prescribed days on feed – that is, 35 days, with not fewer than 28 days of that on a nutritionally balanced ration of a recognised high-energy feed of which grain is the highest single component.

"Rations must have an average metabolisable energy content greater than 10 megajoules per kilogram of dry matter," said Mr King.

"The driver for the standard's development – as with all industry standards – was industry itself. While the idea was not new, the development of an additional shortfed standard was formally proposed as part of the NFAS review in 2014–15.

"It was part of the review recommendations and was adopted into the AUS-MEAT Minimum Standards for Grain Fed Beef by the Australian Meat Industry Language & Standards Committee (AMILSC) this year, coming into effect on 1 September."

Mr King said AUS-MEAT itself was not involved in the development of the standard to the point of adoption by AMILSC.

Once industry had agreed through the committee to introduce GFF however, AUS-MEAT's role was associated with updating the NFAS Standards and associated delivery documentation and advising participants of the changes.

"In addition, AUS-MEAT has the responsibility of ensuring audit documentation and auditors are kept abreast of the changes," he said.

"From an accredited establishment perspective, each site was already required to have systems in place within their documented quality systems with respect to identification, traceability and ensuring that raising claims are supported on product labels. In this regard this additional GFF cipher [or category] is already addressed by existing processes.

“Details of the new GFF Standard were communicated to all accredited feedlots via an Advice Notice at the time of its adoption into the AUS-MEAT language.”

Mr King said NFAS feedlot audits carried out by AUS-MEAT since the introduction of the GFF Standard had not identified any compliance issues – which was as expected, given the maturity of the NFAS and the fact this GFF Standard was simply a variation of existing longstanding requirements.

GFF is the third and most recently launched product in a beef range based on grain-finishing developed by the feedlot industry.

It complements two premium, traditional longfed offerings: Grain Fed beef (or GF, in which cattle receive a predominantly grain ration in a feedlot for a minimum of 100 days) and Grain Fed Young beef (GFYG, in which cattle with no more than two permanent incisor teeth are kept on feed for at least 70/60 days for males/females).

While GF and GFYG use AUS-MEAT Chiller Assessment requirements to determine carcass quality, GFF-eligible carcasses must grade MSA under the Australian red meat industry’s Meat Standards Australia (MSA) eating quality program.

Established in 1998 under the auspices of Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA), the MSA program uses certified graders in processing facilities to collect carcass measurements that predict the eating quality of cuts from graded product.

This allows processors or brand owners to identify, segregate and deliver consistency in eating quality for consumers.

Feedback from almost 800,000 taste tests completed by more than 114,000 consumers in 11 countries was taken into account in developing the MSA grading system, and today the MSA symbol is respected both within Australia and in international markets as an indicator of tender, tasty, juicy red meat.

MSA program manager Sarah Strachan said in 2017–18, 43 per cent of all MSA graded cattle, or 1.34 million head, were identified in MSA grading data as having been grain-fed.

“Of all MSA carcasses graded in 2017–18, 6pc were recorded as being shortfed – that is, between 35 and 60 days on feed,” Ms Strachan said.

“These may have met the requirements of the GFF Standard had it existed then, and today those cattle – more than 193,000 head – would be considered eligible for GFF.

“In that period MSA grain-fed cattle had a compliance rate of 98.2pc and for those non grainfed-accredited animals identified as having had 35 to 60 days on feed – that 6pc per cent – the compliance rate was 99.3pc.”

She said female cattle had a predisposition to deposit fat earlier than males but lot feeders could expect to see individual variation around this.

Ms Strachan said MSA had always recommended producers have cattle “on a rising plane of nutrition for at least 30 days prior to dispatch”.

“This has been based on ensuring cattle have adequate supplies of glycogen – blood sugar – in their muscles to prevent dark cutting.

“Cattle need to be gaining more than 0.8 kilograms per day to absolutely ensure muscle glycogen concentration is maximised, and lot feeding can help achieve this.

“Glycogen is in essence the energy reserve of the muscle.

“The muscle glycogen level is increased by feeding – a process that takes days – and rapidly reduced by stress – which may take only minutes – or activity in the live animal.

“At the point of slaughter the glycogen is converted to lactic acid that steadily decreases the pH of the muscle.

“When developing GFF, ALFA took this 30-day recommendation from MSA into consideration, as well as the need to make allowance for cattle to become accustomed to the feedlot.”

She said while time on feed as a measurement itself did not influence eating quality scores directly, attributes such as increased marbling as a result of feeding did have a positive influence.

Likewise, fat colour – which could often be a company specification – was lightened by lot feeding, as this diluted the yellowing effect of beta-carotene (a natural red-orange pigment) derived from grass in a pasture-based diet, Ms Strachan said.

For more information about the new GFF standard or how to implement it, contact ALFA on (02) 9290 3700 or info@feedlots.com.au.

A detailed fact sheet is also available on the ALFA website at <http://www.feedlots.com.au/>

6.4 ALFA GFF Project: Article 4 – Jim Cudmore and Tess Herbert (600 words)

Grain Fed Finished standard brings greater flexibility

Australian lotfeeding's introduction of a third standard for grain fed beef is a sensible evolution, providing enhanced flexibility for brand owners and processors, Feedlot Industry Accreditation Committee (FLIAC) chair Jim Cudmore says.

The National Feedlot Accreditation Scheme's (NFAS) new standard, Grain Fed Finished (GFF), covers beef from cattle fed a high-energy ration in an NFAS-accredited facility for a minimum of 35 days and that meet all Meat Standards Australia (MSA) grading requirements.

The GFF standard became effective on 1 September.

"All of industry – not just the grain fed industry – is now producing for specific eating quality outcomes," Mr Cudmore said.

"The addition of the GFF standard to the NFAS is working towards satisfying that demand." Australian Lot Feeders Association (ALFA) president Tess Herbert said GFF was a perfect complement to the original two NFAS standards - Grain Fed (GF) beef and Grain Fed Young (GFYG).

"We've always seen ourselves as a finishing system. Our cattle spend most of their lives on grass and we finish the product off on a highly nutritious grain ration," Mrs Herbert said.

"Importantly, product that meets the GFF standard will be 'certified' Grain Fed Finished beef as it will be produced in an accredited feedlot with all of the checks and balances that come under the NFAS. This gives the production of GFF beef a lot more rigour than, say, grain feeding cattle in a paddock in an unaccredited environment.

"The feedlot industry has a strong accreditation system with standards around animal welfare, the environment and product integrity. The NFAS, with its independent third-party annual audit, is the cornerstone of grain-fed beef production in this country.

"GFF is a significant advantage: having shorter-fed cattle but still having the existing integrity of the accreditation system sitting behind the end product – especially as customers become more discerning and increase demand for livestock produced under high welfare and environmental practices."

Mrs Herbert said it was likely operators who were currently feeding grain but were unable to have their product certified as either GF or GFYG because it was fed shorter-term could be among early adopters of the new standard.

Flexibility to produce GFF beef during periods of particularly high grain prices would be among benefits delivered to industry, she said.

Both Mr Cudmore and Mrs Herbert said refinements in grain processing, ration formulation and feed distribution coupled with genetic improvements of Australia's beef cattle herd had brought enormous advancements in grain-fed beef production since the mid-1990s.

“Over the last two decades the genetic base of the cattle we’re feeding has improved greatly so that an animal that may have had to have been fed, for example, for 120 or 130 days to get a certain eating quality outcome in 1995 has the genetic capacity today to achieve it much earlier,” Mr Cudmore said.

“At the same time, our feeding systems have dramatically improved as we’ve learnt to target feed diets to specific groups of cattle.”

“The percentage of cattle now grading MSA is increasing, which shows that the eating quality of cattle in Australia is improving,” Mrs Herbert said.

She said uptake of the GFF standard would occur progressively and would be driven largely by demand from processors.

“Ultimately, the success of GFF lies with brand owners and their ability to build a product offering that appeals to their customer base and the consumer,” Mrs Herbert said.

For more information about the new GFF standards or how to implement it, contact ALFA on (02) 9290 3700 or info@feedlots.com.au

A detailed fact sheet is also available on the ALFA website at <http://www.feedlots.com.au/>

6.5 ALFA GFF Project: Article 5 – Sarah Strachan (600 words)

Grounds for confidence in GFF compliance rates

Results of Meat Standards Australia (MSA) grading carried out in 2017–18 suggest more than 99 per cent of eligible carcasses will satisfy the lot feeding industry's new Grain Fed Finished (GFF) Standard once GFF animals start to flow to slaughter.

The GFF Standard was launched on 1 September this year. It requires that cattle be fed for 35 days as a minimum, of which at least 28 days must be on a nutritionally balanced, predominantly grain-based high-energy diet.

No meat has yet been submitted for GFF certification.

However, by the third week of October about 30 lot feeders from the 400 recognised under the National Feedlot Accreditation Scheme had requested and received GFF delivery documentation from AUS-MEAT. This documentation will in due course enable producers to consign GFF-eligible cattle for processing.

MSA program manager Sarah Strachan said in 2017–18, 43 per cent of all MSA graded cattle, or 1.34 million head, were identified in MSA grading data as having been grain-fed.

"Of all MSA carcasses graded in 2017–18, 6pc were recorded as being shortfed – that is, between 35 and 60 days on feed," Ms Strachan said.

"These may have met the requirements of the GFF Standard had it existed then, and today those cattle – more than 193,000 head – would be considered eligible for GFF.

"In that period MSA grain-fed cattle had a compliance rate of 98.2pc and for those non-grainfed-accredited animals identified as having had 35 to 60 days on feed – that 6pc – the compliance rate was 99.3pc."

GFF is the third and most recently launched product in a beef range based on grain-finishing developed by the feedlot industry.

It complements two premium, traditional longfed offerings: Grain Fed beef (or GF, in which cattle are fed grain for a minimum of 100 days) and Grain Fed Young beef (GFYG, in which cattle with no more than two permanent incisor teeth are kept on feed for at least 70/60 days for males/females).

While GF and GFYG use AUS-MEAT Chiller Assessment requirements to determine carcass quality, to gain GFF certification carcasses must grade MSA.

The consistency with which shortfed cattle achieved this grading in 2017–18 suggests brand owners and lot feeders can embrace the GFF Standard with confidence, reassured of their new beef product's eating quality.

MSA had always recommended producers have cattle "on a rising plane of nutrition for at least 30 days prior to dispatch", Ms Strachan said.

“This has been based on ensuring cattle have adequate supplies of glycogen – blood sugar – in their muscles to prevent dark cutting.

“Cattle need to be gaining more than 0.8 kilograms per day to absolutely ensure muscle glycogen concentration is maximised, and lot feeding can help achieve this.

“Glycogen is in essence the energy reserve of the muscle.

“The muscle glycogen level is increased by feeding – a process that takes days – and rapidly reduced by stress – which may take only minutes – or activity in the live animal.

“At the point of slaughter the glycogen is converted to lactic acid that steadily decreases the pH of the muscle.

“When developing GFF, ALFA took this 30-day recommendation from MSA into consideration, as well as the need to make allowance for cattle to become accustomed to the feedlot.”

She said while time on feed as a measurement did not influence eating quality scores directly, attributes such as increased marbling as a result of feeding did produce positive outcomes.

Established in 1998 under the auspices of Meat & Livestock Australia, the MSA program uses certified graders in processing facilities to collect carcass measurements that predict the eating quality of cuts from graded product.

For more information about the new GFF standard or how to implement it, contact ALFA on (02) 9290 3700 or info@feedlots.com.au

A detailed fact sheet is also available on the ALFA website at <http://www.feedlots.com.au/>

6.6 ALFA GFF Project: Article 6 – Ian King (600 words)

GFF now part of NFAS audits

Auditing of lot feeding operations under the National Feedlot Accreditation Scheme (NFAS) now covers the industry's newest certified product, Grain Fed Finished (GFF) beef, at roughly 30 GFF-ready sites.

As a natural complement to Grain Fed (GF) and Grain Fed Young (GFYG) beef, the two components of lot feeding's established premium longfed range, GFF requires that cattle spend at least 35 days on feed (of which 28 or more must be on a predominantly grain-based diet) and satisfy the Meat Standards Australia (MSA) program's grading requirements.

The Australian red meat industry body AUS-MEAT provides independent, third-party auditing services to the NFAS. AUS-MEAT's role includes ensuring systems are in place and being followed to support adherence to the 35-day minimum feed regime, alongside all original animal welfare, environmental stewardship and food safety features of the scheme.

The NFAS was founded in 1995 as the quality management system that underpins the integrity of Australian grain-fed beef as a safe and responsibly-farmed beef offering.

Every year, all 400-plus NFAS-accredited feedlots are audited.

AUS-MEAT has been a key player in the new GFF Standard's rollout.

GFF was launched on 1 September this year and by the third week of October AUS-MEAT

CEO Ian King said "an encouraging number of lot feeders" had placed orders for the updated version of the paperwork which would in time allow them to consign GFF-eligible cattle.

"AUS-MEAT is not aware whether any animals have been processed as GFF at this stage. However, we have supplied revised NFAS delivery documentation, as the essential declaration, to approximately 30 feedlots to date," Mr King said in late October.

That figure represents just under eight per cent of the scheme's total members.

"Rations must have an average metabolisable energy content greater than 10 megajoules per kilogram of dry matter," Mr King said.

"The driver for the standard's development – as with all industry standards – was industry itself. While the idea was not new, the development of an additional shortfed standard was formally proposed as part of the NFAS review in 2014–15.

"It was part of the review recommendations and was adopted into the AUS-MEAT Minimum Standards for Grain Fed Beef by the Australian Meat Industry Language & Standards Committee (AMILSC) this year."

AUS-MEAT itself was not involved in the development of the standard to the point of adoption by the AMILSC.

Once industry had agreed through the committee to introduce GFF, however, AUS-MEAT's role was associated with updating the NFAS Standards and associated delivery documentation and advising participants of the changes.

"In addition, AUS-MEAT has the responsibility of ensuring audit documentation and auditors are kept abreast of the changes," he said.

"From an accredited establishment perspective, each site was already required to have systems in place within their documented quality systems with respect to identification, traceability and ensuring that raising claims are supported on product labels.

In this regard this additional GFF cipher [or category] is already addressed by existing processes.

"Details of the new GFF Standard were communicated to all accredited feedlots via an Advice Notice at the time of its adoption into the AUS-MEAT language."

Mr King said NFAS feedlot audits carried out by AUS-MEAT since the introduction of the standard had not identified any instances of non-compliance related to GFF.

He said this was as expected, given the maturity of the NFAS and the fact the GFF Standard was simply a variation of existing longstanding requirements.

For more information about the GFF Standard or how to implement it, contact ALFA on (02) 9290 3700 or info@feedlots.com.au.

A detailed fact sheet is also available on the ALFA website at <http://www.feedlots.com.au/>.