

MSA underpins brands in global markets for TFI

A major expansion and shift to focusing on international markets hasn't changed the commitment of Thomas Foods International (TFI) Southern Cross Feedlot to MSA compliance, with the program vital to underpinning its beef brands in global markets.

The EU-accredited feedlot, based near Tintinara, South Australia, has won the 2023 MSA Excellence in Eating Quality Awards for Most Outstanding MSA Feedlot in SA, based on its average MSA compliance of 99.7%, and average MSA Index of 63.95.

It's the third consecutive time TFI Southern Cross Feedlot has won the award.

TFI Southern Cross Feedlot General Manager, Thomas Green, said MSA compliance is an important part of the feedlot's program.

"We have just completed a significant expansion increasing our capacity from 17,500 head to 30,000 head and looking to turn off about 70,000 head of cattle per year," Thomas said.

"We're really focusing on increasing our days on feed to match our client base and what they're looking for.

"We are currently focusing on our mid-fed programs rather than short fed, with 150 to 300-day Angus programs to supply global customers including the EU and United Kingdom markets.

"We're concentrating on high end quality and with that comes carcass weight. Our average days on feed is now about 180 days at exit and looking for 380kg to 450kg carcass weight.

"Our customers understand MSA and what it represents in terms of high eating quality beef. Australia really is the envy of the world with our MSA program, and we leverage that as a commercial business and use it to underpin our major brands."

Thomas said TFI's focus on animal health and wellbeing is key to the feedlot's continued success in achieving MSA compliance, while controlling the supply chain as much as possible is also important.

"We are our own biggest supplier of feeder cattle through our TFI Rural Business, which supplies up to 10,000 head per annum for the feedlot," Thomas said.

"We also source cattle from a number of large-scale producers from south east SA and the western districts of Victoria."

TFI grows as much of its own commodities as possible for its feed rations including silage and lucerne hay, while grain is sourced from other growers due to the volumes required.

To help create a stress-free environment, cattle in the feedlot are provided with year-round shade and

straw bedding in winter, which has resulted in improved feed consumption and conversion.

"By providing cattle with bedding and shade we have seen an increase in animal wellbeing and comfort. This in turn has led to improved MSA compliance and Index due to superior health and performance outcomes," Thomas said.

As part of its recent expansion, the feedlot has constructed a new animal handling facility and veterinary laboratory so it can conduct its own animal health and welfare research and development (R&D) on-site.

The feedlot, in partnership with MLA, University of Adelaide, and Apiam Animal Health, is undertaking R&D into autogenous vaccines to help prevent bovine respiratory disease (BRD) and reduce antibiotic usage.

Autogenous vaccines are custom vaccines produced from bacteria isolated from animals at the source feedlot to stimulate immunity against those strains included in the vaccine.

"We're pretty passionate about our on-site R&D. We're really proud of the autogenous vaccine work and think it will play a big role in the future," Thomas said.

"We're also trialling wearable technology, which are loose collars the cattle wear to track their behaviour, which can flag when they are starting to become sick.

"The aim of the continued R&D work on-site is to reduce animal sickness and antibiotic usage. With healthier, happier cattle we are expecting positive flow on effects such as improved eating quality as a result."

