

NEWS

Beef gamble pays off

Feedlot drought tactic success

BY LUCY KINBACHER

IMAGINE sending 210 “scrawny heifers” from your drought-stricken property only to have them return to rested paddocks four months later, weighing twice as much and presumed in calf.

It is a reality for Coolah producer Dennis Power who established a non traditional drought mitigation strategy using feedlots.

Mr Power runs Angus, Speckle Park and F1/F2 crossbreeding herds on his 6500 acres but was left with 1100 mixed sex weaners facing the prospect of being unsalable due to their poor condition and the restrictive feed conditions for restockers across the state.

Mr Power split the mob between Wonga Plains in Dalby, Queensland, Conargo in NSW and a Victorian feedlot.

The young cattle were put on feed for 100 days with steers forward marketed and slaughtered for \$1800/head while heifers reached \$1650-\$1700/head.

Only 100 stud Speckle Park females and 210 F1 heifers were retained.

Mindful of keeping the females moving forward, Mr Power sought approval from the Conargo Feedlot and placed four Speckle Park bulls in their yard to ensure they didn't miss a normal six-week joining.

Now back home at Mount Mill, the 15-month-old



Dennis Power, Mount Mill, Coolah, with his 210 F1 Speckle Park Angus heifers, which he fed and joined in the Conargo Feedlot during drought. **Pictures: Lucy Kinbacher**



The heifers were fed for 100 days, entering the feedlot at about 260 kilograms and averaging 500 kilograms when they returned home following a six-week joining.

females are a stark reminder of their former selves.

Mr Power said even with the high feed prices it was a worthwhile investment, with confidence your animals could perform.

He estimated the females were worth about \$400 or \$500 when they entered the feedlot in September and gained two kilograms per day while eating about \$500 worth of feed.

“If I had of kept these at home, they wouldn't have

been in joining condition,” he said.

“I'm going to have calves out of these in September whereas if we had of kept them at home, we wouldn't have had a calf.

“They wouldn't have been in good enough order and we'd have had to feed them, which is a big cost too.

“It might have cost you (in feed) but you have got the next five or six calves to justify that cost and if you have quality females you will



The F1 Speckle Park Angus females will be pregnancy tested in the coming weeks after their feedlot joining period.



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soon make that money up in the quality of their progeny.”

Mr Power was eager to retain his crossbreeding genetics having only started sourcing Speckle

Park embryos after a visit to Canada in 2010 where he was impressed by their performance in a Calgary carcass competition.

Since beginning a Speckle

Park/Angus F1 and now F2 program, Mr Power said yields had improved three to four per cent compared with his traditional purebred herd.

“Another thing I like is their fat cover, particularly on the long fed cattle,” he said.

“On the 100 to 120 day fed cattle we are finding that they are coming with that three or four millimetres less fat which puts a lot more of your cattle into the grid.

“We fed the brothers to these heifers at Dalby and we killed them only near a fortnight ago and out of 209 there was only one that fell outside of the specs in the fat.

“And 80 of them had B butt scores.”

Mr Power offloaded cattle into feedlots during the 2002 and 2006 droughts but had never tried joining his females at the same time.

“I wanted to AI all these heifers but we looked at the logistics of AI-ing them and being a bit too far away,” Mr Power said.

“I thought if the feed-lotters allow us to put the bulls in with them then it's pretty simple.

“They're in such good order they were cycling unbelievable.”

The heifers were to be pregnancy tested in the coming weeks but Mr Power was confident of a strong result.

Mr Power will be among attendees at the Why Speckle Park field day Yeoval on February 15 where feedlotters, butchers, producers and a NZ breeder will discuss the impacts of Speckle Parks in the beef industry.

Producers can register for the event online at Eventbrite or call Amy Dickens at 0427 464 333.