

CQ WAGYU ON MAP

It has been a talking point for years. The enormous gates, decorated with giant cactus cut-outs and emblazoned with the name Bar H Grazing, are unorthodox in central Queensland – and so are the cattle behind them.

For the past 24 years, the Hornery family has been quietly producing Black Wagyu at their Comet property along the banks of the Nagoa and Mackenzie Rivers between Emerald and Blackwater.

"It was Dad's idea," explained youngest son, Que Hornery, who manages the enterprise at River Lea.

"He actually realised we had to produce better beef instead of better animals and it was something out of the norm and people weren't actually doing this. "That was completely out of left field."

Patriarch Percy is a risk-taker, and this has seen the family diversify from cattle to watering trucks to helicopters and even a charity, which are all part of the Hornery Trading Group.

Older brother Derran heads up the transport arm of the business, while the land and cattle side is Que's responsibility.

Middle brother Lachlan lost his battle with cancer in 2008, and it is because of this the family raise funds for cancer patients through a pink watering truck named 4ULOC.

"Dad is chief executive and he overlooks everything. We only have one ABN, but we still isolate these as separate businesses that have to stand on their own two feet."

Wagyu first arrived in Australia in 1990, and a year later the Hornerys began establishing their own herd. Rather than sourcing bulls, they realised it was less hit-and-miss to go down the artificial insemination route and this enabled them to build up their herd quickly.

Inga Stünzner
livestock editor

inga.stunzner@fairfaxmedia.com.au
(07) 4927 9422



"We selected the right genetics from day dot, and by using no bulls we could use the best genetics in the world, and we selected from Canada and the US."

The AI program continued for the next 15 years. Before moving into Wagyu, the Hornerys had Bos Indicus cows initially joined to Angus and Murray Grey bulls, and these calves provided the base of the AI program.

Bar-H Grazing now has a herd of more than 2000 cows and 40 working bulls, and the herd is segregated into each of the different crosses and generally single sire mated in a 90-day joining window.

"We now have 20-odd years of gathering data so you can track down what bulls in Australia are producing, and they are just as good or if not better than the semen you can import at the moment. But back then, it was unknown."

In one of the nearby paddocks, Angus-cross heifers – the F1 herd – are in calf to Wagyu bulls and their progeny are carrying 90 per cent Wagyu genetics. "These F2 are our ultimate," Que said.

The genetic pool for the breed is very small, as only five animals left Japan, so the Hornerys have invested more of their time and money into management.

"If you go back four generations, they meet, so a lot of time is going into keeping the genetics separate."

River Lea, which is 20,000 acres of predominantly Buffel grass pasture

with the areas of developed river flats, has been fenced into 38 paddocks for this very reason and watering points are in the middle of the paddocks. "When we had one watering point at the corner of four fences, bulls would break through the fence and mix the genetics."

Most paddocks run about 140 cows to three bulls, while others have smaller herds of 50-80 cows to one bull.

On average, Bar H Grazing sells 1800 weaners steers and heifers to the feedlots, mainly The Rangers Valley in NSW, which has been a customer for the past five years.

"We don't send anything that we wouldn't want to The Rangers, so we always keep the tail-enders, which is with any herd, and either eat them ourselves or put them through the saleyards and let

someone else take them through to the meatworks," Que said. And that was only a very small percentage. "Currently all our weaners have averaged around 240 kilograms at point of sale."

Each year 50 to 70 heifers are carefully selected and retained as replacements.

The temperamental central Queensland environment has not had affected the Wagyu. Que said the breed was surprisingly adaptable. "Every day they surprise you when you are working with them – they acclimatise to any climate."

Cattle arriving from Canada's winter into the summer months here simply shed their coats, and ticks are just a management issue. "I think the breed hasn't taken off in this country as it has the potential to. You might not sell them directly into the Wagyu system, but it will raise your fertility, tem-

perament and you will still get the dollars at the end with the finished product."

Returns were anywhere between 30 and 80pc more on the commercial market compared with other breeds, and the Wagyu market more consistent, he said.

"The commercial market may shoot up or close to the Wagyu market but then it will go back down again and has that wavering. But the Wagyu market has stayed solid and not declined."

After spending the past two decades quietly beavering away on developing their herd, the Hornerys are now ready to showcase it at the 2015 Wagyu International Conference.

On Monday, May 11, there will be an on-property tour and the Hornerys will put on a lunch for an expected crowd of 130 "to put us on the map".

Que Hornery, Bar H Grazing, Comet, with his Wagyu-Angus cross heifers. These heifers are in calf to Wagyu bulls and their progeny is the ultimate goal. Picture: GODNEY GREEN

