

Bull Creek claims Queensland MSA win

The management strategies that underpin the business of Queensland organic grassfed beef producers, James and Sarah Pearson, are also key to their success now as award-winning Meat Standards Australia (MSA) producers.

Organic grassfed beef producers since 2005, James, Sarah, and their children, Ella, Sam, and Alex, operate Bull Creek Beef across four Queensland properties.

This year, the Pearsons have won the award for Queensland's Most Outstanding Non-Grainfed Larger Producer in the 2023 MSA Excellence in Eating Quality Awards.

The more than 3,800 head of cattle the Pearsons consigned for processing over the two-year period of 2021-23 achieved an average MSA Index of 61.01 and MSA compliance of 98%.

The Pearsons run a Santa Gertrudis herd with their cattle sold directly to the Hewitt Group owned Arcadian Organic and Natural Meat Company in Toowoomba, supplying both the domestic and export markets.

Their breeders are run at the 19,500-hectare Bull Creek Station, McKinlay, in the State's North West, as well as at the 19,500ha Boorara, Blackall, and the leased 5,000ha Knockninny, Barcaldine, in the Central West.

James said depending on seasonal conditions, most of their steers are sent as weaners or between 12 to 15 months of age for finishing at the highly productive 10,121ha Dawsonvale, Taroom, in the Western Downs district.

"We call Dawsonvale a grass feedlot. It's very high quality buffel grass country," James said.

"It's strong Brigalow softwood scrub country with a lot of volcanic soils and does a wonderful job fattening cattle.

"We have grown oats there the last couple of years for finishing when pastures are a bit dry although this year's crop is only ordinary.

"We are planning to start a blade ploughing program next year to regenerate the soils and introduce some legumes in as well.

"Our steer consignments have been averaging from 380kg to 415kg carcass weight at 2.5 to 3-years old.

"We aim to turn off a softer animal and temperament is important."

Around September every year, Dawsonvale managers, Peter and Jackie Hill, weigh all the cattle that are due to be slaughtered the following year and group them into weight ranges within 50kg.

"Each of those groups are then placed into paddocks. They stay in those groups and paddocks until we sell them. They are transported for processing at Australian Country Choice, Cannon Hill," James said.

"We are big believers in working our cattle quietly. Peter and Jackie do an excellent job of mustering, processing

and presenting our turn off cattle for slaughter.

"Swalling's Transport who do our freight from Dawsonvale always arrive with excellent gear and great drivers. The Cannon Hill processing plant is first class. Our carcass yields are about 4% higher than most other plants we have used. The people that work for and with us have all had a very important role in achieving these MSA results."

The Pearson's invest heavily in genetics every year buying bulls for their own stud so they can breed their own bulls for their commercial herd.

"We have a saying when selecting cattle – long and wide and tall and deep. We aim to choose big, flat-boned, long-muscled animals that are very structurally correct," James said.

"We look at Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs), particularly for eye muscle area (EMA) and fertility. We only buy bulls with over 80% morphology, and they have to have good weight gain figures. Eye appeal is very important and is the deciding factor."



Continued next page.



Queensland organic grassfed beef producers, Sarah and James Pearson, Bull Creek Beef.

James's parents, Russell and Tricia from their Toowoomba base have hit the southern bull sale circuit this year, sourcing some bulls from Dalby and Santa Central sales.

Over the years, bulls have been sourced from mainly western Queensland based studs. James's parents have been breeding Santa cattle since the late 1960s with the original genetics coming from Gylanda, Strathmore, Millungera and King Ranch.

"We have always found them to consistently outperform in our conditions across different markets," James said.

In addition to the steer portion of their herd, James said they are also try to finish their surplus heifers, targeting 300-320kg carcass weights, which have also been grading well.

"We take everything through to slaughter because there are not any big margins over the conventional market if you're selling store cattle," James said.

"When the cattle market is down like it is now, that's when we traditionally see the margin for organic cattle remain strong.

"MSA is an important part of that and great way to benchmark where your herd is placed. By continually improving the quality of grassfed beef across the industry it can only enhance the eating experience to the end consumer. MSA is a proven tool for both consumers and producers to guarantee meat quality and is integral to underpinning a lot of different beef programs."