

# Pastures key to MSA performance for leading Victorian producers

**Running their grazing operation like a dairy farm to ensure a year-round supply of quality feed for their cattle has underpinned success for Gippsland beef producers, Neville and Karen Beecher.**

The Beechers run a mix of Angus, Hereford, and Angus-Hereford cross cattle on their farm at Churchill, and their MSA results have seen them win Most Outstanding Non-Grain Fed MSA Larger Producer in Victoria in the 2023 MSA Excellence in Eating Quality Awards.

The Beechers, who have been MSA registered producers since 2017, achieved an average MSA compliance of 99.7%, and average MSA Index of 63.51 across 2021–23.

With an average annual rainfall of approximately 800mm, the Beechers run their property like a dairy farm, growing as much ryegrass and clover as possible while maintaining a good supply of fodder to ride out tough seasons.

They sell the best of their silage to dairy farming clients with the rest kept on-farm for their cattle.

“We put down a base fertiliser on our paddocks and use the advice of our agronomist. We also re-sow ryegrass and clover each year to top up the paddocks and make sure we have feed for winter,” Neville says.

The cattle are supplementary fed silage in autumn and have access to hay to feed on ad lib in winter.

“Cattle have a tendency to lose condition in winter, but we make sure they have plenty of grass and hay to keep them moving forward,” Karen says.

“We don’t have a set target weight for turning them off, but we aim for round a 400kg carcass weight.”

Rotational grazing is also used on-farm to carefully manage pastures and maintain weight gain.

“We don’t graze our paddocks down to picking level, even in autumn,” Karen says.

In the yards and during transportation, the focus on low-stress stock handling continues.

The Beechers transport their cattle themselves, supplying the Greenham Bass Strait Beef brand.

The Beechers are part of the Greenham Never Ever Beef Program, which specifies that cattle are grassfed, MSA certified, that no hormone growth promotants (HGP) are used, no antibiotics are used, and the cattle are free from Genetically Modified Organisms.

Their close proximity to Greenham means Neville and Karen can continuously select the best of their cattle for processing.

The Beechers look at their MSA feedback in myMSA and

attribute their ongoing high rates of MSA compliance to their feeding regime.

“We look at the feedback in myMSA. We’re not buying in the most expensive, top lines of cattle, but I think our results come down to how we feed our cattle and maintaining quality feed all year round,” Neville says.

For the Beechers, the path to becoming award-winning MSA beef producers started as a sideline to their agricultural contracting business.

“Our approach to our cattle business has been more opportunistic, and dependent on the market and seasons,” Neville says.

“We produce silage and pasture hay and provide cultivation services for clients. We used to run about 200 head, mainly for fodder management, but when drought hit about five years ago and cattle prices dropped, we increased our numbers to over 1,000 head.

“We were buying in steers and heifers at the right price and sold them at a good time.

“When we could see cattle prices getting high, we transitioned to cows and calves. As our calves are growing out to heavy heifers or bullocks, we are selling our cows and transitioning back to buying in steers, which is more a work/life balance decision.

“We have downsized to about 300 head now. We buy through AuctionsPlus and local store markets, to source weaners between 200-300kg from producers who we have bought from previously and had good results with.”

