

Scottish Angus at forefront for Alto Angus at Caramut | Alto Angus Stud

Written by SHANNON TWOMEY, *The Weekly Times*, January 25, 2015

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Making a comeback: One of the Scottish Angus calves which is representative of a breed with the benefit of native genetics.

RETURNING native Scottish Angus genetics to Australia is at the forefront of the Howley family's stud operation at Caramut.

Geoff and Joy Howley run the Alto Angus stud using genetics from the Dunlouse Angus stud in Scotland and say the breed still offers longevity in a cattle herd.

“The native Scottish Angus are still low input, sustainable cattle, with moderate height and generally wider and deeper fleshing,” Joy said.

“They boast structural soundness, space for breeding organs and capacity to convert grass.”

Joy said the native Scottish Angus breed was making a strong comeback across various parts of the world as producers rediscover the benefits of the native genetics.

But the genetics could have been lost if breeders didn't realise their value.

"Preservation of all species is important and the original Angus genetics should be preserved," she said.

"We consider they offer real benefits for producers and consumers and certainly deserve their reputation for great beef.

"They are fertile, easy calving, better converters, they can be finished on grass and still provide a high quality carcass with marbling and little back fat."

Joy said in the 1960s there were 80 native Scottish Angus families and today there are only eight, with 69 registered calves in the UK.

"Fortunately in the 1990s when fewer than 50 cows remained, Geordie and Julia Soutar who run the Dunlouse Angus stud, realised the importance and value of the cattle and set out to save the surviving native Angus families," she said.

"Their Dunlouse cattle are now thriving and have been exported world wide. History is repeating as the original Angus once again is gaining popularity through the traits that won it recognition in the beginning."

Joy said the original pure Aberdeen Angus were recognised by the UK Angus Society as native bred. In Australia they are known as native Scottish Angus.

"To qualify, their whole pedigree must be traced to the original herd book of 1862 and they must not have any imported animals in their pedigree," she said.

Before breeding the native Scottish Angus, in the 1970s the Howleys ran the Calrossie Angus stud, which was formed on Barwidgee bloodlines.

Joy said her Alto Angus Australian cows were all descendants from Barwidgee cattle.

"We still use Calrossie King M1 in our Australian herd today and many of our commercial calves are from the cow Barwidgee Thelma F66," she said.

Since 2005 the native Angus cattle have been the main focus for the stud, which has worked with four native Scottish Angus cow families, all sourced from the Dunlouis stud.

“Our first pure native Scottish Angus embryo calves were on the ground in March 2012 from the Erica and Cherry Blossom cow families,” Joy said.

“Since then we have calves from two further cow families, Jipsey and Ruth of Tillyfour and in total have 16 native Scottish Angus calves.”

Ease of production and profit per hectare are a big attraction to the breed, according to the Howleys.

“If meat is going to be sustainable in the future, breeders need to look beyond weight gain,” she said.

“As customers seek the benefits of grass-fed meat, breeders must look beyond the biggest weight gain and seek to improve fertility, grass conversion and longevity in their herd.

“We can’t afford to let those vital traits of production fall away.”

Joy said requirements of fattening cattle did not match those of the breeder producer.

“Much of the gain in weights has been at the expense of fertility, and breeders must take back some control in the production of cattle,” she said.

“Lifting fertility will lift production of the Australian herd more than any other factor.”

“There is an opportunity to lift fertility and thereby production of the Australian herd by at least 20 per cent and there is no other area where this gain can be made so easily.”

Joy said at a meeting for the recent Angus review for Breedplan indexes, she noted a plea from breeders to concentrate on fertility, grass conversion and longevity.

“For some decades the indexes have been concentrated on the feedlot where they just want feed/grain conversion and an animal to breathe and stand long enough to reach the required weight,” she said.

“There may be a place for this, but it should not be at the expense of common sense and diversity, be it the animals breeding capacity or the consumers’ choice of product.

“Breeders are correct in calling for more concentration on breeding and production traits. We ... empathise with the consumer who wants to be confident in their meat and its production history.

“Marketing some mature grass-fed beef direct to consumers has proved a beneficial exercise in our understanding of our animal’s performance and also of the process of butchering and marketing premium beef — well beyond a supermarket product.”

