

## First Grassdale cattle

MORT and Co are very pleased to announce that the first cattle arrived at the new world class 30,000 head Grassdale feedlot south of Dalby on Tuesday this week. This initial intake is a very positive step for the facility and is the culmination of a five year process from the initial acquisition of the property to now.

## General comment

ENOUGH has been said about currency, grain prices, reduced numbers on feed and feedlot closures. The validity and relevance of comments from various quarters of the industry about the current demise in lot feeding are sure to be tested over time. The strength of export demand for grain fed beef has driven growth and enhanced efficiency in the processing and lot feeding sector over the past seven to 10 years. This growth has underpinned feeder cattle demand, supplied by a significant proportion of the store cattle produced. With the benefit of cheap grain many of these have been sold well above historical averages. This in turn has enhanced land values and equity levels in many businesses.

Change continues to be our number one certainty. With this in mind the standard goals for all beef producers must firmly remain efficient production and turn-off of sale cattle, effective and efficient management of all resources, and advanced management of price risk - particularly as animals get closer to desired and optimal sale targets.

Beef producers now faced with relatively high land values and increased market uncertainty, have (much like the lot feeding sector) a very apparent catalyst for refocusing on what will drive the future of their business.

## Cattle market

THE store market now seems to be at a level that understands prices offered for feeder cattle are well and truly at the upper limit and lower levels are desired, and required, to operate effectively. Feeder cattle demand is being driven by the unloading of cattle from drier areas, due to seasonal constraints. Price levels are to a great extent bound by a small number of available forward contracts and a general reluctance to speculate on the future spot market. There is an underlying theme that continues to come from various levels of the beef supply chain that near record beef prices in the domestic and export markets are not sustainable and any opportunities to soften these will be pursued.

## Grain supply

RAIN across parts of the Darling



Downs and other growing areas, bodes well for sorghum production this summer. The underlying lack of moisture profile in most growing areas requires continued follow up rain to realise the potential that is eagerly anticipated by those of us remaining in the lotfeeding sector looking for opportunities to generate cheaper cost of gain.

The price differential between sorghum and wheat of about \$120/tonne has most operators more focused than usual on the weather map, in hope of a bumper sorghum crop, and hopefully an easing of cur-

rent price levels to enhance the lot feeding equation. Variable quality across much of the wheat harvest to date has feedlots weighing up the actual grain and milling quality and subsequent feeding performance relative to price.

The fundamental concerns amongst lot feeders with regard to screening levels, apart from the measured level of screenings, is the potential that the proportion of grains that didn't fall through the sieve may be very close to doing so and the overall variability in grain size and desired weight. Smaller grains are

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IN part four of this series we will focus on grain processing, in particular steam flaking

Steam flaking (pictured left) is a process that consists of three individual activities - tempering, steaming and rolling.

Tempering involves a quantity of water, normally 100 to 150 litres a tonne of whole grain, being mixed with whole grain then let sit for 12-18 hours.

Once the grain has had time to absorb this moisture and soften, this tempered grain is then 'cooked' via the addition of steam in a vessel known as a steam chest, effectively a small silo with steam injection equipment. The steam chest is sized so that the tempered grain will ideally spend about 25-45 minutes (depending on grain type) in this steaming phase before being rolled.

The tempered, steamed grain is passed through a large set of rotating rollers, the warm, soft grain is rolled or crimped into a product known as flake - flaked wheat, flaked sorghum etc. The flake is then ready to batch with other commodities and forms the primary ingredient of the feed ration.

The steam flaking process aims to maximise the available energy in every mouthful of grain. Hence optimising the animals' use of that product for body maintenance and weight gain. Maximum energy utilisation translates to efficient cost of animal weight gain.

Steam flaking is an industrial process that requires focus and management in order to get it right. It's a relatively expensive process from an energy and engineering standpoint and hence desirable outputs are needed 100 percent of the time to justify the costs involved.

Intense management of moisture levels, moisture consistency, steam regulation and steaming time is critical in achieving opti-

harder to process as they have reduced surface area to enable effective moisture uptake for tempering, subsequently they are more difficult to roll and starch, and potential energy levels relative to weight is usually lower and more variable.

The obvious focus for custom feeders continues to be feeding efficiency and cost of gain.

The willingness or necessity to utilise lower quality grain has the potential to negatively impact feed conversion ratios and thus customer performance.

Those 'non-commercial' lots will-

num levels of gelatinisation within the grain. Gelatinisation is the process whereby starch molecules are broken down making energy readily available to the animal. Grain gelatinisation occurs at temperatures of 65-67deg C for wheat and 67-77deg C for sorghum.

The degree of grain rolling (post steaming) determines the grain density or 'flake weight' as it is known. This is measured in kilograms/hectalitre. Control of flake weight is important. Over processed grain (very low flake weight) will break up and have 'fines'. Excessive fines translate to inconsistencies in the energy availability of one mouthful of feed to the next.

This inconsistency manifests itself in digestive upsets and stress to the animal. Rolling parameters are normally directed toward breaking the seed coat and increasing the overall surface area of the grain in order to facilitate the rumen digestive process.

Modern, well managed feedlots employ sophisticated energy processes and equipment to manage the steam flaking process.

The measurement of faecal starch is considered to be an 'in line' measure of grain processing efficiency.

Basically a measure of how much energy is being wasted by the animal because it was in some unavailable form when it was passing through the rumen. Steam flaking reduces the level of faecal starch loss and the variability in loss.

The general rule of thumb in terms of metabolisable energy value of steam flaked grain compared to dry rolled is a benefit of about 13-14pc for wheat and 21pc for sorghum.

The overall goals of the steam flaking process are to optimise starch (energy) availability to the animal and hence the most efficient use of grain inputs.

ing to utilise lesser quality grain, and who are not able to accurately measure the basic key performance measures such as average daily feed intake and average daily weight gain, run the risk of exacerbating the feed performance outcomes presently not reported or fully understood in their operations.

The 'opportunity cost' of doing it yourself compared to seeking assistance from a specialist custom feeder at least provides a high degree of measurability and not surprisingly potential for a better financial outcome.

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