

# Up to the challenge

Visitors to Beef Australia 2018 were offered a farm tour with a difference – the chance to fly into 'Kaiuroo' and see the management strategies employed by managers Jennifer McCamley and Tom Emmery first-hand.



**SNAPSHOT:** Jennifer McCamley and Tom Emmery, Kaiuroo aggregation, Central Queensland 



**Enterprise:**  
Brahman stud and commercial breeding and finishing for organic market

**Livestock:**  
900 breeders, 3,000 commercial cattle

**Pasture:**  
Natives, Buffel, irrigated leucaena undersown with Rhodes and Gatton panic

**Soil:**  
50% native tablelands, 25% deep alluvial river flats, 25% brigalow scrub soils

**Rainfall:**  
650mm

During the past four years, Jennifer McCamley (pictured opposite) and Tom Emmery, of Ag Resources Management, have nursed the Kaiuroo aggregation through the worst droughts and floods in living memory.

Three once-in-100-year events occurred in the past four years – the driest year, the highest rainfall in a 12-hour period and the highest flood level ever recorded. This was followed up by more flooding in March.

"Everywhere you look there is something damaged or not operational," Jennifer said.

Despite the environmental challenges, a commitment to good genetic selection, effective breeder management and pasture improvement is seeing them lift the productivity of the Kaiuroo Brahman stud and organic beef enterprise.

The enterprise is run on an aggregation of five conjoined central Queensland properties owned by the Rohatyn Group. The country ranges from prime river delta (at the junction of the Mackenzie and Isaac river systems) where young stock are finished on irrigated leucaena, to harsh tablelands where mature breeders are managed for optimum pregnancy rates.

Tom and Jennifer explained their management strategies to Beef Australia visitors. These included the following:

#### Breeder focus

"One of the best decisions we've made is to manage our commercial herd joinings according to seasonal conditions, rather than to a calendar," Tom said.

"Bulls are only put out after it's rained – in the past few years that's been as late as January and February – and we manage our mobs according to foetal ageing determined at pregnancy testing."

Cows are drafted into early or late pregnancies and empties.

"If cows are too late getting back in calf, the option is to segregate them or sell them as pregnancy tested in calf cows," Tom said.

"The benefit has been far less age and weight variation in the calves and the cows are much more even in terms of body condition score.

"It also helps us manage our breeder condition and to control supplementation of lactating cows with calves of similar ages."

Tom and Jennifer supply cattle each month to Australian Organic Meats and have the benefit of almost 650ha of irrigated leucaena, undersown with Rhodes grass and Gatton panic, for finishing.

If conditions tighten, Jennifer said early weaning is their relief valve that ensures cows generally don't slip below condition score 3.

#### Genetic selection

Jennifer, the daughter of Sir Graham McCamley of Tartus Stud, grew up understanding performance recording, genetic and, later, genomic selection.

Her commitment to improving the quality and quantity of performance data available for Brahmans has continued with the Kaiuroo Stud. The stud has become involved in an MLA Donor Company-funded project with the Animal Genetics Breeding Unit to enhance Brahman fertility traits described in BREEDPLAN.

"All our registered bulls and heifers are involved in the program and are being genotyped," she said.

"Bulls are recorded for sperm morphology, and heifers and lactating first-calf females are scanned to determine age of puberty and lactation anoestrus.

"The strong linkages of the Kaiuroo Stud to significant Brahman sire lines means this work will have real and positive ramifications at the breed level."

Culling is another aspect of the genetic improvement strategy for the commercial herd.

"The first cull of the heifers occurs before joining, with the focus being on temperament and structure. Any animal that does not make the grade is spayed and fattened on leucaena ready to be sold. After pregnancy testing, the empties go to the organic market," Jennifer said.

Sires selected to join to the commercial herd also have to meet a set of criteria.

"Importance is placed on calm temperament, structure, reproduction, growth and meat quality, and Brahman BREEDPLAN is a critical tool for us in this selection process," Jennifer said.

#### Technology

Kaiuroo has the benefit of investment by the Rohatyn Group in state-of-the-art flood irrigation, live-entry data-recording systems for all herds, and modern cattle-handling facilities with hydraulic gates and crush operations.

Jennifer believes safe, efficient stockyards are essential.

"We're working towards putting more safety features in our yards but we're also committed to training our staff in low-stress stock-handling methods," she said.

"It's really important to have quiet cattle that are happy to move about the yards calmly – it pays dividends right through the value chain." ■

## LESSONS LEARNED

- > Foetal ageing is an effective management tool to improve productivity and profitability.
- > Quiet cattle pay dividends from producer to consumer.
- > BREEDPLAN is becoming a more effective genetic selection tool as more high quality phenotypes and genomic information enter the analysis.

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BREEDPLAN:  
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Tips on growing leucaena:  
mla.com.au/planting-leucaena

Calf survival checklist:  
mla.com.au/calf-survival-checklist