

## LOWLINE BEEF MEETING THE MARKET

The idea of developing a branded Lowline beef product has always been one of Margo Hayes' projects and dreams. Being able to turn that dream into reality has not been that easy. Firstly continuity of supply and secondly an outlet where all parts of the beef could be sold not just the primal cuts was needed.

Now finally after 10 years the dream has come to fruition. With the approach of Andrew Wishart who owns four very large butcher shops in Brisbane and a new shop in Lowood that will specialize in Lowline Beef it has become possible to develop the project and make it work. The synergies that both provide really compliment each other and both parties have learnt a lot about how each others business works. Andrew has the outlets, the turnover, and the expertise in marketing beef whereas Margo is able to source the supply, help market the beef, select the genetics and provide the feeding regime required.

Andrew approached Margo after viewing her website. The photo of the carcass that won Grand Champion at Royal Brisbane Show in 2007 was what he saw as ideal carcass size for his shops along with the concept that she already sold boxed sides of beef. He also saw the ability to promote Lowline Beef as something unique and give him a marketing edge...differentiates his product. Andrew also likes to purchase animals whose hot carcass weight is no greater than 200kg (also referred to as the domestic supermarket trade) making it more manageable for his cold rooms and shops. This often means that the smaller size carcass results in him purchasing from the abattoirs yearling beef, which lacks the flavor, that older beef. Lowline carcass fit his specification perfectly with the quality and flavors he is seeking.

Andrew's Quality Meats at Mt Ommany turns over 12 carcasses a week averaging 2,500 kg of beef. Don't forget that Andrew has 4 other shops doing similar amounts so there is always room for expansion! Currently Andrew is processing on average three Lowline carcass a week. The feedback he has received from his customers is excellent. Andrew recently took home some beef from a Vitulus Purebred steer that was fattened up to display at the Small Breed Field day. He said it was the best beef he had ever eaten which is considered high praise.

With the purchase of over 50 Lowline and Lowline x steers since August this year from various Queensland breeders a valuable market has been provided for the small acreage farmers. Transport is provided to collect the steers and a premium of up to \$1.80 per kilo is paid. Base rate is \$1.60 plus an extra .10c for those that are vaccinated and supplied with health records and an additional .10c for those animals that are sired by Vitulus bulls.

Steers of all ages are bought from weaning up until two years of age. They are then grain assisted (they still have access to grass pastures) and it would seem that the optimum number of days is approximately 90 days. This is still in the experimental stage to find the optimum number of days with the correct fat coverage. Obviously every animal is different but already there are some genetic lines that are performing better than others.

In 2009 a forward contract is in place to purchase from a large commercial producer at St George who already uses Vitulus bulls over their commercial Hereford herd. In addition, in late February 18 purebred Lowline steers are making their way up from Canberra.

There have been some lessons learnt from both parties along the way. From Margo's perspective the margins that the shops operate on and getting the right fat coverage is the most important and hardest thing to do. Butchers hate excess fat as it is wastage but obviously some fat coverage is required for quality beef. From Andrews' perspective is how to select the genetics and feeding regime.

The process is being no means complete. There are plans for wholesale supply and expansion into other shops once the numbers build up and demand increases. Hopefully it will grow to be a significant player in the branded beef market.