

Chapter 3 - Breeding Cattle For A More Natural System

Shane Joyce: So it's a standard thing in the beef cattle industry to, in the dry season to, supplement with urea to help the animals digest indigestible grass and dry grass. Angoni cattle come with that mechanism in the metabolism. They can do it themselves. I can produce the juice. They need to digest really crap grass. So that's one of the advantages of these animals. And if you if you look at these angoni animals they are rolling fat, they really doing well. Yeah, one of the things with these animals is the hide which is probably worth more than the beef at the end of the day. If you get the hide tanned and so there's a floor mat.

Okay. So what's your marketing plan? We're running a breeding herd. So we basically the bull is in with these animals all the time, but we're pregnant testing to try and get into a three month or two or three month carving interval. Anything that doesn't fit into that we can eliminate through preg. testing. Rather than having to try and manage one bull on his own to take him out of the cows for 10 months of the year, we've preg tested 43 heifers. We've got ten empties. We've worked out an agreement with another young couple who are an hour and a half from here in Biggandin and they've got an online marketing scheme for beef. So the empties will go to the Biggandin meatworks to get processed. They're cut up by the local butcher. And then these guys will sell all that meat online. So we're going down that channel of not end of the industrial meat market. We're going down more this channel of small-scale producer to consumer marketing and rather than do it ourselves here. We're busy enough here without loading ourselves up with another job. We're making a week cooperating with somebody. Says he's in that marketing Vine. So hopefully for the benefit of all of us rather than rather than being in competition we're working on cooperation.

They are selling currently into the Brisbane Sunshine Coast and Toowoomba. But yeah then so the so every year when we preg test the empty staff will go down that channel and our calves we hope will go into that same marketing channel. So they'll go from the farm to the meatworks into packs and sold online. Strengthen your herd by eliminating the ones that don't get pregnant.

There's a saying in the industry. I think it was developed by a guy called Alf Collins up north of Rockhampton at Marlborough and Alf talks about calf or carcass. So he comes out of a stud Brahman background breeding bulls to sell and he doesn't care what the pedigree of his cow is. If she doesn't wean a calf she goes to the meat works. A calf is not good enough. She's got to actually nurture the calf until weaning before she gets a ticket to stay for the next year. So I'm working much the same paradigm here because we haven't got room on the ship. They've all got to be generating income and producing.

Helen Disler: “How big is this paddock?”

Shane Joyce: God Matt? What's the area of this paddock? Total is 16 hectares. So that's been cut into 6 paddocks and then each one further gets cut into seven or eight paddocks as we graze it.

Helen Disler: “And down there is that the gully with the phragmites in it?”

Shane Joyce: “Yeah down the bottom there. So the drainage lines in this property. There's two gullies. One comes in out of a neighboring place and one comes in across the road. They meet in the center of the place and then discharge down here into the Widebay Creek. So when I came here there was phragmites and bulrushes and various reeds growing in the gully. However, the livestock had access to the gullies 24/7 365 days of the year, and that was where they got their water so all the reeds and rushes and phragmites were all basically grazed into the ground. The gullies were all fenced so I didn't need to fence them apart from in one paddock. I don't exclude the cattle out of there. I still put cattle in there and graze that but they're not in there all the time. It took the phragmites three years to recover from that grazing of livestock, continuous grazing. What's happened with it now, it's created basically a filter system for these gullies. And Peter Andrew of natural sequence farming fame talks about phragmites as being the best filter plant and what happens in these gullies now and they run, nothing gets out of these gullies, discharges out of these gullies except crystal clear water. There's no vegetation and no soil, no nothing leaving except crystal clear water. So it's grown into an amazing filter system.

But what we've just done here we've just out of a hundred and forty-one hectares. We've just baled up about 50 hectares. Got a contractor in and from went through and baled about 50 hectares. The majority of it is in our lower country that's prone to frost. I grazed a lot of it prior to winter, end of the summer going in to Autumn, to get it down short. So I had utilisation of it and opened it up so that if there's any winter active species they had a chance to come up. I'd only had time to turn around once and the grass had grown back up to the top of the fence. I had nowhere near enough cattle to deal with.

So I got on the phone and rang this guy up. He bailed hay here last year as well so I rang them up. They come here with everything mowers, conditioners, rakes, loaders and trucks and they just they do the whole operation and I just get a cheque at the end of the day. I can sit on the veranda and watch them do it.

They sell it. Yeah, I've had a few people contact me and ask if they can get some hay. I said, I'm sorry. It's all sold off the plan. Basically, it's all sold before they bale it.

Helen Disler: “So a lot of farmers need hay as a reserve, so what's your theory on that?”

Shane Joyce: “If you make hay the best thing to do with it is to sell it or compost it.

But it's for me it was an opportunity crop. It was surplus grass to what we needed. By the time we got to using it a lot of it would have been unpalatable. Yes, it would return to the soil but in harvesting it, we've created a cash flow. We've, what they call in syntropic farming, reset the country.

So we've literally, we've done a pruning of the plant which creates the plant to release a hormone which fires up the soil biology. We've opened the country up for any potential winter actives to come. Obviously we're late in the winter now, so we've probably missed that opportunity. We could have done it earlier and got a better kick with that.

But the other thing is we've got all that country open now for spring growth when we get our spring rain, so we'll get the light, it'll get to the ground and get a massive recruitment of new grasses as well as new life in the old grasses there. And the other thing it's created for us is in those paddocks they're largely free of rat's tail, but it's a cakewalk to go through there on a quad bike and spot spray any rat's tail that may be in there because it'll be the first thing that will come up and it's really easy to identify so it's brought in so many opportunities for us is apart from creating cash flow.

Yeah. It's just made poof! Suddenly the farm's got another dynamic that's evolved out of totally out of opportunity, out of the rainfall. We've had rainfall here from March through until June. Consistent soil moisture all the way through so we've had this total abundance happen, and we've been able to now capture it.

Helen Disler: “Just getting back to native species, was there much here when you came to the farm?”

Shane Joyce: “Native grasses. This place has been farmed, I guess as a dairy farm, it's been ploughed and planted and grown cereal crops and fodder crops and introduce grasses. So it's got probably almost every species of introduced legume and grass that you'd grow in this area. So there is very little natives left. There is some areas over on the hill over here where there's trees, that was a largely a native grass paddock and some of this strip through here where we are, was lot of natives because it's too rocky for them to get in and plough it.

Over that side then the predominant native grass over that side was wire grass - one of the aristides and I had a local pasture scientist of great repute come out here in the early days and we did a grass monitoring thing and he told me that he had never seen so much aristida are in one place in his life! But I've was talking to a friend of mine, Raymond Stacy. Raymond came from a dairy farm down near Beaudesert and he said they had a paddock that was exactly the same and it was the paddock that ran their dry stock in so it was continuously grazed forever and a day. That same Paddock has got a concrete feed trough in it where obviously they fed the animals. So you can see in five years there's been a massive transformation in that paddock in the range of the natives that are coming back there. The aristida is no longer 90% dominant. It's starting to sink back into where it should be in the system but yeah, not a lot of natives here.

The other native grass there's a lot of here is down on the lower, on the frosted country, a thing called angleton grass, which is of questionable merit. Angleton grass. I've read conflicting stuff on it and like sometimes you'll see outside that it disappears out of a pasture because of poor management and that it's not a very good grass. Anyhow, so the jury's out on it, but I've found with some of the angelton grass where I've not had stock on it tends to die out and it is getting replaced with rhodes grass.

So this is some of the giant rat's tail grass and I didn't want to let you get away without showing you how to test the digestibility of grass. So it's just you take some grass and you can go around and around and around and around and around and around forever and it doesn't break. So that's classic of what the rat's tail grass is like and that's like the stuff that broke before was the dry stalks. This leaf will just go on forever. And if you if you take one of the other grasses, which is not really much around here, but your digestible grass, you'll go about two times and it's gone, broken.

But yeah, this has got a lot of lot of dead stalks in it now and what's actually happening in some of this stuff out here, it's actually starting to die in the centre, so lack of utilisation. It's starting to cave in which is really good. So basically the water system we set up here. To begin with there was no water system on this farm.