

Progeny Testing at Blackmore Wagyu Beef:

It was clear we needed a scheme for progeny testing as soon as possible to be able to provide reliable data on the quality of genetics being produced for Australian conditions.

Progeny Testing of Sires

When fullblood Japanese genetics became available in Australia via the United States (US) in 1993, it was clear to David Blackmore that a scheme for progeny testing needed to be established in Australia as soon as possible to be able to provide reliable data on the quality of genetics being produced for Australian conditions.

After approaching various government bodies, commercial companies and the Australian Wagyu Breeders Association (AWBA), David Blackmore decided to go it alone when no help was forthcoming.

David Blackmore began setting up a program that would meet the following criteria:

- Test as many A1 sires as could be afforded
- Produce profitable carcasses to pay all expenses
- All data must be creditable
- All data must be reliable
- All data must be accepted by the industry including other countries
- Bulls within the program must be able to be compared with bull proofs bred in other countries

The program started at the Rutherglen Research Centre owned by the Victorian State Government. Blackmore believed that this would give the program credibility with the Japanese Authorities due to the centre being government operated. Subsidies, grants and commercial feedlot rates never eventuated from government departments or breed societies and after feeding three groups of steers the program was moved into a commercial undercover feedlot at ICM Farm Products Australia, trading as Peechelba Beef in Victoria.

A relationship with a leading Japanese University was developed and the assistance of a leading Professor in Japan was invaluable. Blackmore also became involved with a prominent Japanese farmer, Mr. Shogo Takeda. This support and guidance is still ongoing today.

The program used a ration that is specifically used in Japan for progeny testing, and as the data was collected it was produced into a Japanese format which highlights the same reliability as Japanese progeny testing.

Over 90% of all Japanese bred and slaughtered carcasses have pedigree information, compared to less than 10% in Australia. This allows the Japanese to conduct highly reliable progeny test programs. Japanese data has been collected since 1976 and is accessed in the B.L.U.P. (Best Linear Unbiased Prediction) system, similar to the dairy system used world wide. By using previously

BLACKMORE WAGYU BEEF

proven Japanese sires in the program, Blackmore was able to use the Japanese data in the proof of his progeny test sires, allowing for a higher degree of reliability.

It was important that 30 years of data from progeny testing in Japan was not lost in the Blackmore program in Australia. No other beef breed in the world has such a creditable genetic base as the Japanese Wagyu.

It was decided that both the AUS-MEAT and Japanese grading systems would be carried out on the carcasses in order to compare the differences in results. The following difficulties were discovered;

- Australian grading is done between the 10th and 11th rib
- Japanese grading is done between the 5th and 6th rib
- Japanese have 16 areas assessed in the carcass
- Australia has 9 areas assessed in the carcass

After assessing over 70 carcasses Blackmore was satisfied that he had a good understanding of the differences between the Japanese and Australian grading systems. By conducting the comparison, Blackmore was able to calculate the differences between marbling and other characteristics at the two rib grading sites. For example, the marbling score was consistently 1.5 to 2 marbling scores higher at the 5th and 6th rib (Japanese site) and the 10th and 11th rib (Australian site) on the same carcass using the Australian grading criteria, which supports the fact that the Wagyu breed begins to lay down marbling in the muscle from the front of the body. The difference between the other assessment criteria was also significant but understandable; i.e. if fat depth was excessive it was at both sites, if the eye muscle size was small it was at both sites.

This information will put Blackmore Wagyu Beef at the forefront of the Australian industry by being able to access the true profitability of a sire through progeny carcasses assessment. There are plans to include a dollar value on each carcass trait. With the inclusion of many generations of Japanese progeny test sires feeding into Blackmore Wagyu Beef progeny test data, the Blackmore progeny testing provides more reliability and creditability to future buyers.

Progeny Testing of Donors

Blackmore Wagyu Beef has been running two programs side by side. The first a direct sire comparison as discussed above, and the second, a dam based comparison between Blackmore Wagyu Beef donor cows based on the M.O.E.T program established in the United Kingdom (UK).

Blackmore Wagyu Beef currently produces and transfers over 1,000 embryos each year. This puts Blackmore in a unique situation, where he can produce many carcasses from donor females in a short period of time. It allows the comparison of cow families, individual females in those families and just as importantly, which sires give the best results to individual matings. The genetic gain is phenomenal when all of these combinations are used.

Since all the bulls have been proven in the one herd and they have all been accessed under the same climatic conditions, management and feeding regime, a higher degree of reliability in the bull proofs has been achieved.

BLACKMORE WAGYU BEEF

This has taken David Blackmore many years of planning and a lot of research dollars to get to this stage. Blackmore has assessed carcasses and has created 'link sires' through all the groups so each group and each sire can be compared directly with other sires. By using 'link sires' Blackmore is able to use the carcass results of a bulls' siblings to determine performance, instead of using direct progeny.

From the day the semen is used it takes 3 ½ years to obtain data on a sire. In David Blackmore's opinion there has not been a creditable Wagyu performance assessment scheme considered or put in place in Australia. Wagyu is a unique breed with many traits and characteristics not comparable to other breeds or existing schemes. These traits must be assessed in a creditable and reliable format, one that is understood and respected by prospective users both domestic and internationally.

To date David Blackmore has not released any information in its entirety, even though he continually gives breeding advice to other breeders around the world. The use of this information has certainly given Blackmore an advantage in selecting the best available genetics to produce the world famous Blackmore Wagyu Beef.

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