Calf Weighing

... in the south

One of the pleasures of my job has been the wonderful people I meet and seeing how they handle challenging cattle tasks. One such person is Susie Chisholm. She runs a 460 cow commercial Angus herd near Adelong in southern NSW.

The ‘Gwalia’ herd is fully recorded on BREEDPLAN, as a progeny test herd with the Te Mania Angus stud. This includes weighing calves at birth: a challenging and difficult task which this petite 60 year old, does on her own, with the aid of a good cradle.

Susie finds the calf weigher a great help, particularly as the calf can generally be tipped over into the bucket, (one hand each on the tail and flank), rather than lifting the full weight. I circle the cow and calf a couple of times on the bike, which seems to disorientate the cow as to her calf’s location, giving me time to catch the calf. Once the calf is upside down in the bucket, the cows are very quiet. Susie told me. The performance recording, as well as assisting Te Mania, is value adding my cow herd and the steers are in great demand.

... and in the north

At the other end of Australia, in a completely different environment, the staff at ‘Alexandria Downs’ are also using this calf weighing cradle to good effect. Alexandria is a North Australian Pastoral Company (NAPCO) station. It is approximately 16 000 sq km and runs a breeding herd of 40 000 composite cows. The composite has been developed since 1987 and is now stabilised at 3/8 Brahman; 1/8 Africander; 5/16 Shorthorn; 1/8 Charolais and 1/16 Hereford. There is a bull breeding nucleus of 1000 cows which has detailed performance records taken, including birth weights. Stud head-stockperson Pam Allsop, told me the cradle handles the conditions well, with only some minor alterations to strengthen it.

The bulls are evaluated through the company feedlot in southeast Queensland. We are particularly happy with the fertility of the herd on ‘Alexandria’ (average over 80%). Growth rates, adaptation and carcass quality are all very good.

Other calf weighing equipment: In the 2000 edition of BREEDPLAN News, we featured an excellent cradle, with gas lift struts, developed by Warwick Vinge when he worked at ‘The Glen’ Murray grey stud. An improved version is now made and sold by Trevor Allen (02) 6037 1545.

Brian Sundstrom

Note: The calf weigher shown here and opposite, was originally made by Ruddweigh and marketed by ABRI. It is now made and sold by Ramage engineering Guyra 02 67791958.
Structural Scoring Update

Industry interest in structural scoring is increasing with herds in both Australia and New Zealand scoring animals. However, data has been slow to come into the system despite reduced BREEDPLAN processing rates (50c per animal covering all traits on one day) and Angus Society of Australia absorbing this on behalf of its own members.

Australian Angus has over 3300 animals recorded from 23 herds for structural traits. There are another 1000 animals recorded from other breeds as well.

ABRI has continued to process structure data at half the normal rate (ie. 50 cents rather than $1.00) and this offer has been extended to 30 June 2005. The Angus Society of Australia will continue to absorb this fee for its members as well. The discount applies to data added to the database prior to the cutoff - so submit your data for processing as soon as possible!

AGBU has included developing an analysis for structural traits into their workplan for the second half of 2005 - assuming there are enough animals with structural data recorded on the databases (AGBU needs at least 5000 records of reasonable quality with genetic linkage to proceed).

A second structural scoring accreditation course was run in July 2004 and there are now 16 accredited assessors in Australia and three in New Zealand.

Jack Allen

Details of accredited assessors are on the BREEDPLAN web site: http://breedplan.une.edu.au/