Another major project for CRC II, is a study of 'best bet' Regional combinations of genotype and nutrition. There are five sites across Australia, two in Queensland (Charters Towers and Rockhampton), Wagenup in WA, Hamilton Victoria and Griffith, NSW. They are each testing nutritional options relevant to their region, allowing lines of steers of different genetic potential (for carcass type) to be grown at different rates, and finished for various markets.

The NSW site is on "Bringagee" station (AgReserves Aust), near Griffith. It is supervised by NSW Agriculture researchers John Wilkins, John Irwin and Bill McKiernan (pictured at a recent field day at Bringagee).

Groups of 500-700 Hereford cows are involved at each of 5 matings for Spring and Autumn calving groups. These are being joined by AI to five carcass types in the sires, each represented by eight sires (40 total):-

1. Angus High Yield % EBVs
2. Angus High IMF % EBVs
3. Angus High Yield % and IMF % EBVs
4. Wagyu (Black and Red)
5. Charolais and Limousin

After weaning, the steer progeny follow either High or Low growth paths, to reach (average) 400 kg feedlot entry weight at either 13 or 19 months of age. The split calving design allows the Low growth group from one calving to join the High growth group from the following calving to come together for finishing and slaughter at the same time. This is essential for valid comparison of performance and carcass quality between groups.

The first two calvings have been completed in May and October 2001. Subsequently, the first group have been weaned (in January 2002) and started on their post weaning growth treatments. The most important data from this project will not emerge until the first groups have been right through the process to produce carcasses. However some interesting trends have been found at weaning. The potential for different carcass composition, as expected by the sire types, is already suggested by fat depth, eye muscle areas and subjective muscularity scores at weaning. Progeny with higher marbling potential had higher fat depth measurements, while higher yield potential was reflected in higher eye muscle area and muscularity.

This project has a spinoff, as well as collecting the core results for the main project, in generating useful experience in managing AI programs in large commercial herds.

In some breeds and regions, calf weighing is an important part of stud recording. Several types of equipment have been designed to increase safety and speed up this difficult job. Some I have featured in this newsletter, and more ideas are welcome.

I have heard several good reports on the Ruddweigh loadcell bucket (marketed by ABRI), pictured right. This is particularly good for large herds. Slings offer a cheaper and at times more flexible alternative. The one on left is designed and sold by Andy Withers “Belmore” Shorthorn stud in South Aust. (08 87653218). It is easy to clean and very secure (angled across the shoulder and hips, with one fore and an opposite hind leg out).