

PASTURE UTILISATION:**Backgrounding feeder cattle**

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The Australian feedlot industry has recently undergone rapid expansion in response to increasing demand for beef meeting export market specifications. Consequently, the demand for cattle by feedlots is now very strong. Backgrounding is the nutrition and management of weaners during the grow-out phase to produce feeder cattle that meet strict feedlot entry specifications. The development of greater backgrounding capacity is an essential requirement for improving the availability of suitable feeder cattle and the ability of feedlots to supply high quality beef competitively (Anon 1995). This paper describes the evaluation of alternative pasture-based backgrounding systems for the efficient and profitable production of feeder steers.

Methods

Three backgrounding systems are under evaluation at Glen Innes:

- improved pasture (phalaris/fescue/white clover) [System 1];
- improved pasture plus concentrate (cottonseed meal pellets) [System 2]; and,
- improved pasture plus forage crop (Italian ryegrass, cv. Concord) [System 3].

These supplements are strategically used to overcome the winter/spring feed gap. In the first year (1994), 405 weaner steers (from BREEDPLAN herds) comprising a range of breeds, herds, sires and weights were allocated across the three backgrounding systems. These weaners were grown out to an average 300 kg as domestic market feeder cat-

tle or 400 kg as export feeders. Animal assessments include measurements of liveweight, fatness and height, and scores of condition, muscularity and maturity type. Pasture measurements include yield, growth rate, botanical composition and nutritive value.

Results and Discussion

During supplementation there were large effects of backgrounding system and herd of origin on liveweight gain per day. Gains over this 75 day period were 0.501, 0.758 and 1.043 kg/day for Systems [1], [2] and [3] respectively. Export feeders from systems [2] and [3] achieved heavier liveweights, by 16 kg and 42 kg respectively, than those from pasture only. Domestic feeders from system [3] were 14 kg heavier than those from other systems. Continuing work will relate pasture characteristics and feed intake to animal growth, and will determine the efficiency and profitability of alternative backgrounding systems.

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References

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