

Consumers Demand Young, Lean Beef

As the Director of Nolan Meats in Gympie, Qld, Terry Nolan is privy to the carcass data of approximately 100,000 head of cattle every year. As a stakeholder in Private Selection branded beef he also has a fairly unique insight into what the Australian consumer expects when they sit down to a steak. According to Terry, young, lean, tender beef consistently gets the nod and he believes this attitude will become increasingly prominent the world over.

“We have always been great believers in sourcing young cattle which have natural moisture and tenderness.”

As Nolan Meats contemplates a move toward developing export markets in South East Asia Terry said the company will cater to the desires of its customers.

“At 200 to 280kg our typical carcass is probably a little light for the Korean and Japanese markets. If they require heavier carcasses we can certainly deliver it.”

“The traditional premium market in Japan is for highly marbled beef but in the years ahead I believe it will grow increasingly unpopular to waste money and grain feeding cattle for marbling when you can get a similar eating experience from younger, leaner cattle.”

He said that over the last ten years in this business, retail butchers and consumers have complained consistently if they have received meat with too much fat on it.

“Today’s consumer is health conscious and they also want an enjoyable eating experience.”

The key to fulfilling both desires is a combination of genetics, husbandry, nutrition and technology.

On the first issue of genetics the ideal animal for Nolan Meats will be out of British/ Bos Indicus cow by a European bull.

“Obviously being in Queensland we need the Bos Indicus content to ensure that the animal, and perhaps more importantly their dam, is an efficient performer in our local conditions. The British content ensures sufficient fat cover. The European content is important because consumers demand lean meat. It also delivers additional yield which is important when we are trying to produce the maximum quantity of beef at a young age.”

While this is the ideal combination for South East Queensland Terry says it is vital for producers to look at the breed mix which performs best in their region.

“We have to be able to deliver cattle to the domestic market at a price point that meets the expectations of the consumer. This means we have to breed cattle which are efficient in their local environment.”

Ideally Nolan Meats purchases cattle that have come straight off the mother and which are 9 to 10 months of age. The majority of those cattle are then fed at the Nolan Meats feedlot. They will spend 80 days on feed before slaughter. They are expected to gain at least 1.6kg per day and are slaughtered at 12 to 13 months of age.

Terry says there are some simple husbandry procedures which producers can adhere to in order to best cater to the feedlot and retail meat sector.

“Maintaining a thorough vaccination program is vital. It is as simple as treating calves with 7-in-1 when they are still on the cow. Anyone who has seen offal such as kidneys condemned because of leptospirosis won’t need convincing about the need to vaccinate. That is the obvious sign. What is harder to detect is the corresponding drop in productive capacity.”

In terms of nutrition

Terry is a believer in feeding the best quality rations.

“All of our cattle are fed on a three grain mix. You need to put good feed in to produce good beef. We believe that grain feeding adds another level of consistency to our product.”

Finally Terry says that embracing Australian technologies such as Breedplan, MSA and NLIS will assist in delivering a great eating experience to the Australian consumer and will help beef hold its own against competitors such as chicken.

“Unfortunately it seems to be an Australian trait to beat up on anything invented here but I think we can be justifiably proud of technology such as Breedplan and quality assurance programs such as LPA, MSA and NLIS.”

All Nolan beef is MSA graded and Terry believes the NLIS is long overdue in Australia and says it is much more efficient than the British Passport system.

Tenderstretch technology has been another boon for Nolan Meats. Simply put, tenderstretching sees the carcass hung so that the legs and back hang in the natural position. Nolan Meats is one of the few processors to have adopted Tenderstretch throughout the entire boning room. The change came after Nolan Meats was used for the MSA trials of Tenderstretch in 1996-97. Terry says the results of the MSA tests were compelling.

“On average the Tenderstretch side of beef was 10 points ahead of the traditionally hung side on eating quality. The day we got the results back we changed to Tenderstretch.”

While Terry says they have to sacrifice 6 to 8 percent of chiller capacity to accommodate the different method of hanging he believes it has been instrumental in helping Nolan Meats establish a reputation for quality.

It is this reputation for quality which has seen Nolan Meats grow from a retail butchery established by Terry’s parents Pat and Marie in 1958 to an operation which employs 290 staff and boasts a feedlot, an abattoir, a wholesale distribution centre and an export registered storage and distribution centre. It is run by brothers Michael, Tony and Terry and remains 100% Australian Owned.



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