



Buffalo News

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Official newsletter of the Australian Buffalo Industry Council (ABIC)

Workshop on industry issues

The Department of Resources and Northern Territory Buffalo Industry Council will convene a joint workshop with industry stakeholders next month to consider issues currently confronting the buffalo export trade.

A department spokesperson said the Northern Territory Government supported the live animal export industry and appropriate animal welfare standards.

He said the impending workshop would provide the opportunity for industry and government to discuss the concerns of the buffalo producers and exporters and explore possible measures to address these concerns.

"It will also ensure a level of common understanding among participants, of the issues currently facing the industry," the spokesman said.

Buffalo trade in crisis in wake of export ban

The Northern Territory's live buffalo export sector has been brought to its knees by factors including the flow-on effects of the Australian Government's June 2011 temporary shutdown of the live cattle export trade to Indonesia.

No buffalo have been shipped to Indonesia this year, and only 453 have gone there since the trade suspension imposed in the wake of disturbing media exposure of inhumane treatment of livestock in some of the country's abattoirs.

The ramifications are still being felt acutely in livestock industries, including the buffalo industry - with flow-on to Top End producers, Aboriginal communities that can harvest wild buffalo, and other enterprises.

The cattle trade resumed with stringent requirements for exporters, including the need for animals to be stunned prior to processing.

Buffalo producers say that before the sudden shutdown, Territory animals were being shipped to Indonesia at about 3000 head a year. The industry was an-

icipating a significant increase in export numbers in the future, with rising interest from players with potential to muster and export wild buffalo. The only live buffalo to leave Australia this year have been 111 head shipped to Brunei. Top End producers has suffered a recent slowdown due to factors including reduced export permits and Indonesia's 350 kg animal weight restriction.

The situation has been exacerbated by the uptake of livestock stunning in Indonesian abattoirs in light of stringent new ESCAS (Export Supply Chain Assurance System) livestock handling rules. They say buffalo are too difficult to stun with customary devices, because of the density of their skull. Despite the fact that Mark 4 boxes are currently approved for buffalo slaughter without stunning, livestock stunning has become the favoured easier option and exporters are not risking sending buffalo to Indonesia. The industry is now working through ways to get the trade back on track. *Cont Back Page*

Top cheese awards for Trevor

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Buffalo ready for shipment - a rare sight since last year's live cattle export ban

ABIC Website - www.buffaloaustralia.org

Taking cheese-making to the classroom at Girraween Primary

Sharon Arthur from Beatrice Buffalo Dairy at Lambells Lagoon near Darwin joined Class 5-6 students at the rural Girraween Primary School in June to demonstrate the intricacies of producing your own cheeses.

Sharon had pre-prepared a lot of material so the longer processing that cheese normally requires could be compressed into the available school hours. She showed how milk forms a curd when rennet is added (Panna Cotta or junket for the older amongst us); made ricotta cheese from buffalo milk and produced mozzarella after stretching, forming and processing then showing how they're stored. Some goat milk was also processed to make Chevre (a goat milk cream cheese).

The students were able to taste all the products and the rest was stored for the Girraween Field Day held on the following Thursday where all the public were also given a tasting treat. The class prepared a large range of agricultural products for the day including goat satays, green paw paw salad, buffalo and goat cheeses, basil pesto and many other products from the school farm. Girraween School has a strong focus on teaching the students where their food comes from and particularly the sustainability issues with food and the environment. The school usually has chooks and pigs, raises cattle

or buffalo calves as poddies, and this year ran some goat kids. Students are taught a host of things including respect for animals, responsibility for ensuring livestock are properly looked after; feeding, watering, housing and protection from predators and weather.

It is a great learning experience and allows food and farm studies to be integrated with other subjects such as maths, to work out quantities, injection dose rates, feed requirements and other important aspects.

PHOTOS: (Left) Various sized Mozzarella balls cooling in cold water before storage, (Middle) Making ricotta, (Below) Sharon shows students the art of cutting the curd.



Buffalo News

We welcome contributions on any issue or activity relating to Australia's buffalo industry. Stories and/or photos can be sent to, or discussed with:

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Buffalo cheese snares top awards

Queenslander Trevor Hart from Maleny's Cedar Street Cheeserie has just been awarded two of Australia's most prestigious national prizes by the popular Delicious Magazine. Trevor is an artisan cheese maker who prides himself on creating top quality soft cheeses including Haloumi, Mozzarella, Bocconcini and his newly developed 'Love Supreme', another moist fresh cheese.

One of the judges commented: "The Haloumi was worlds apart from what's available in the super markets. It was tender and molten, the texture was delicate and the flavour absolutely divine."

Trevor makes all his cheeses in a well-appointed home cheeserie and regards his end product as high level craft, adjusting his treatment of the cheese to achieve subtle differences in each batch as he makes it. And he ensures top quality cheese by starting with top quality milk - supplied by Maleny buffalo producers Mal and Margaret Thompson. They often have discussions about subtle changes in the milk due to change of seasons, fresh cows etc. Trevor describes the relationship as symbiotic as each meets the needs of the other and works towards the future.

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NEW RIRDC REPORT: *Enhancing productivity improvements in the Australian Water Buffalo Industry*

RIRDC has released its report (SEE KEY POINTS BELOW), compiled by buffalo researcher Barry Lemcke, on a comprehensive project aimed at exploring/identifying issues considered important to the overall development of the emerging buffalo industry. The importation of Riverine buffalo into Australia has changed the production focus from purely meat to dual purpose, with the addition of milk production into the enterprise mix.

Background

The most significant buffalo numbers are currently in the north of the Northern Territory (NT). However, there are buffalo now in all states of Australia, including Tasmania and also New Zealand, with the primary interest being dairying. There is a steady demand for dairy buffalo stock from local and overseas buyers; however, available numbers are still limited, particularly after the prolonged drought in southern Australia.

Buffalo numbers are currently increased from a very small base through Artificial Insemination (AI) using imported dairy semen from Italy in order to prevent inbreeding. This project experienced a breakthrough in AI by achieving conception rates of up to 64% with the introduction of semen from a new supplier in Italy. Also, a new technology is now available and under testing called “sexed semen”, which may make dairying much easier in the herd building phase, if it could assure the birth of only heifer calves.

Methods

Thirteen AI trials, using in-season and out-of-season protocols, were carried out at the NT Department of Resources' Beatrice Hill Farm, with different variations of drugs, semen and times of the year.

Ten buffalo were slaughtered at the Oenpelli abattoir, 250 km east of Darwin. Two different age groups were presented and two muscle sites were sampled, vacuum packed, frozen and dispatched to the Meat Science Laboratory at the University of New England.

Milk testing was carried out at the second largest buffalo dairy in Australia, owned by ADBC in Millaa Millaa, north Queensland (QLD). Dairy Express was the testing and reporting organisation. The milk composition review was passed to the University of Melbourne as part of its new Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) project.

A national buffalo seminar in Indonesia was used as a platform to advertise the potential of Australian buffalo to lift livestock and meat production in Indonesia.

Recording of herd data in the register/database continued.

Implications

It is now certain that high success rates from the use of AI can be achieved anywhere in the country if all factors learnt are applied. This is particularly applicable to buffalo dairy farmers and future stud herd owners. If semen becomes available



from other countries in the future, Australia can be assured of maintaining sufficient variability in its genetic pool for whatever purpose the buffalo is intended.

There is an urgent need to record as much data as possible in the register/database, to ensure that the estimates of heritability, estimated breeding values (EBVs) and other parameters are accurate. The larger the numbers that are recorded in the system, the higher will be the accuracy obtained and the more useful to the industry as a whole.

There is scope for a large increase in buffalo dairy activity, particularly from the cattle dairy industry to take on a new enterprise without having to significantly alter infrastructure. The main impediment is the shortage of animals to populate dairies around the country. First crosses are more readily available and cheaper and can act as a building block to get into the industry earlier. The buffalo meat sector has potential once suitable strategic abattoir facilities are established in relevant parts of Australia. This may become harder as smaller abattoirs around Australia close due to environmental and cost pressures.

This report is an addition to more than 2000 diverse RIRDC research publications and forms part of our New Animal Products Buffalo R&D program, which aims to accelerate the development of viable new animal industries. It will be available for free downloading or purchasing online at <https://rirdc.infoservices.com.au/items/12-055> from the end of July 2012. Purchases can also be made by phoning 1300 634 313.

Results / Key Findings

- Conception rates using AI were above 50% with both in-season and out-of-season drug synchronizing protocols.
- There was no statistically significant difference in tenderness due to age in the slaughtered buffalo.
- A large amount of milk testing data is now available for inclusion in the buffalo database.
- Papers were presented at the 9th World Buffalo Congress and at the Indonesian National Buffalo Seminar, highlighting progress in Australia.
- The 'Best Practice Manual for Water Buffalo in Australia' will be published in 2012.

Buffalo News & Views . . .

from around the country



wants to look at traditional cheeses from out-of-the-way villages from European countries such as Turkey and the historical regions of Capadoccia. He is seeking new and creative ways to define his own signature.

QUEENSLAND

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Trevor also has built a relationship with the top restaurants he supplies and the customers who buy directly from him at farmers markets. Going forward, Trevor

NORTHERN TERRITORY

Opportunities for significant buffalo meat sales continue to slip by unfulfilled because of a lack of suitable processing facilities.

The buffalo industry continues to field regular queries from potential domestic and international buyers wanting to access buffalo meat. One recent query came from a major north Queensland fresh meat wholesaler seeking information on where to access buffalo meat supplies. The long-standing Cairns family company fills more than 900 large and small orders a week for local beef and other meat products, including kangaroo, crocodile and exotic lines. It mainly services the district's hotel, motel, restaurant, mine site and household consumer trade.

This potentially valuable customer has been referred to the Gunbalanya Meatworks, the only buffalo meat processor in the Territory at this stage. With plenty of live buffalo available for processing, local producers are hoping the proposed new AACo abattoir, on track to be built at Noonamah just south of Darwin next year, will provide a long-awaited boost to the industry.

NATIONAL

The Australian Government's final response to the Productivity Commis-

sion's inquiry report on Rural RDCs and the National Strategic Rural R&D Investment Plan is included in a major policy statement released this month. The statement announces 'significant improvements in rural research, development and extension which will see greater collaboration on research, investment boosting efforts and a drive to improve the adoption of innovation across the sector'

The government says the measures will improve R&D coordination and priority setting, and increase transparency and accountability in the RDC model, the pursuit of productivity growth, and operational efficiencies and value for money on investment.

Key changes include: measuring performance across the broader rural R&D system; greater RDCs collaboration on cross-sectoral research such as soils and climate change; enabling RDCs industry-requested marketing funded by a dedicated levy; matching government funding for private voluntary contributions where research findings are public, and moves to attract more private domestic and overseas investment.

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Live export stalemate

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Meanwhile, producers have been lobbying for support on the dilemma, with face-to-face and written approaches to the Federal Government, so far without satisfaction. They've also taken up the issue with Federal Shadow Agriculture Minister John Cobb during his recent Darwin visit. In particular, the producers want support from the man behind the live trade suspension decision, Federal Agriculture Minister Joe Ludwig. Interstate producers back calls for something to be done including support for more abattoirs to be established across Australia.