

Top cross delivers result

Angus sires lift weaner growth

BY KYLIE NICHOLLS

ALPINE Angus genetics play an integral role in the Michelini family's beef breeding operation in the state's north east, producing quality first-cross weaners for the annual blue ribbon sale at Myrtleford.

Based at Porepunkah in the Buckland Valley and trading as Vallunga, Dino Michelini, his brother Ilario and their families have been running Poll Hereford cattle on their 243-hectare property since the 1960s.

But about 10 years ago, they decided to introduce Angus bulls from the nearby Alpine stud to provide increased marketing opportunities and a boost in weaner growth rates.

The Michelini family now run 130 Poll Hereford breeders and 70 heifers alongside their 40ha vineyard, growing a range of selected Italian grape varieties sold under the Michelini Wines banner. The day-to-day management of the cattle is handled by Mr Michelini's son-in-law Matthew Treloar.

About half of the breeders are joined to Glendank Park Poll Hereford bulls to supply the herd replacements, while the Angus bulls are joined to the heifers and a portion of the mature cows.

"We introduced Angus bulls in about 2012 due to market demand and premiums," Mr Michelini said.

"I love the temperament



CONSISTENT QUALITY: Introducing Alpine Angus bulls to his Poll Hereford herd has lifted calf growth rates and market demand in Dino Michelini's beef operation at Porepunkah.

of the Herefords, but the Angus bulls give us a boost in hybrid vigour and faster weight gains, it's a great crossbreeding mix.

"The Angus-cross hits the 300 kilogram target live weight very comfortably before the weaner sales while the Herefords are always a couple of months behind.

The Michelini family are long-time clients of Alpine Angus working closely with Alpine manager Chris Oswin and Alpine stud principal Jim Delany to select their bulls.

"For me, low birth weight and calving ease is critical," Mr Michelini said.

"I want a birth weight of about +3 to +3.5, but definitely no more than +4 to suit the heifers and the higher the percentage the better for calving ease.

"Growth rates, particularly 200- and 400-day weight are also important."

Visually, Mr Michelini is focused on structure,

particularly feet, moderate frame size and a good carcass shape with plenty of muscling.

"I think the Alpine area has a very good name for producing quality cattle," he said.

"Our aim is to breed a consistent line of weaners that will go on and perform for people.

"Alpine Angus are well-respected cattle breeders, they provide excellent support and are great people to deal with, you can't ask for more than that."

The cows and heifers are joined at the end of June for 12 weeks to start calving in early April.

Pregnancy testing is carried out in March after the weaners have been sold and Mr Michelini is pleased with the current conception rates of more than 90 per cent.

On the recommendation of their livestock agent Dan Ivone from Nutrien Ivone Agencies, they now use a

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Dino Michelini, Vallunga, Porepunkah

Multimin trace mineral injection administered prior to joining which has significantly lifted calving rates.

"About three years ago, we added the Multimin supplement when we drench them before joining," Mr Michelini said.

"Since then, our conception rates have improved by more than 10pc."

Any empty cows and heifers are sold immediately, which has also contributed to the in-built fertility of the herd.

Mr Michelini admits the cows don't receive any

special treatment, but will be supplementary fed through the cold, wet winter with good quality pasture hay, made on-farm.

The calves will run with their mothers through to the end of February, and are weaned about two weeks before the weaner sales.

They are kept in small holding paddocks, supplemented with hay and handled extensively until they quieten down.

"I think a good weaning program is important," Mr Michelini said.

"It probably takes them

about a week to settle down.

"The weaning paddocks are very close to the house and sheds so they soon get used to people and machinery going past."

The calves are then marketed through the Myrtleford annual weaner sale held by Nutrien Ivone Agencies in early March with a live weight of 350 to 360kg targeted for the Angus-cross steers.

"Anything over 300kg is a bonus, but generally the heavier end of the steers will weigh about 350 to 360kg while the lighter end of the calves average 280 to 300kg," Mr Michelini said.

"The prices have been excellent during the past couple of years, this year the best of the Angus-cross steers made \$2400 a head while the best of the Herefords made \$2350/hd.

"It has been a profitable change, the Angus-cross weaners probably attract a premium of \$50 to \$100 plus.

"We also have had quite a few repeat buyers for our cattle and the feedback has been very positive.

"They've all been very impressed with how much weight gain the calves produce, which is pleasing."

This season, Mr Michelini has retained 70 Poll Hereford heifers for breeding which are classed on frame size, structural soundness, colour and eye pigmentation.

Depending on their herd requirements, any surplus heifers will be sold as pregnancy-tested-in-calf to the Alpine Angus bulls.

"We'll do an economic analysis as to whether we keep them all or sell a portion," he said.

"They are really nice heifers so we are keeping our options open depending on the market and prices."



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