

Ultrablacks northern solution

By **BRAD COOPER**

NINDOOINBAH – it might be difficult to pronounce, but there's a sure bet that very soon this specialist cattle breeding centre near Beaudesert will have some of the industry's heaviest hitters spruiking its growing influence on northern herds.

At the very least, the work being done at Nindooindah over the past six years, since it was bought and renovated by businessman Euan Murdoch, is forcing an array of stud breeders and pastoral giants to take notice.

A smattering of those were at Nindooindah this month to look over the breeding centre's Ultrablack, Angus and Brangus females that will be offered at their on-property sale on March 23.

Among those looking at the breeding program were representatives from Stanbroke Pastoral Co, NAPCO, the Indigenous Land Corporation and Georgina Pastoral Co chairman Peter Hughes, who has brothers to the sale heifers working over breeding cows on his company's Lake Nash Station, NT.

Also there was Angus Australia CEO Peter Parnell, former NFF president David Crombie and Roma stud breeder and World Brangus Congress chairman Ian Galloway.

Under the management of Nick Cameron, who will also speak at the Genetics Conference during BeefWeek about conducting large-scale artificial breeding programs, Nindooindah has embarked on an ambitious embryo transfer and reproductive program on a scale they say is foreign to northern Australia.



World Brangus Congress chairman Ian Galloway, Duarran, Roma (centre) at Beaudesert recently with Nindooindah's Euan Murdoch (left) and Nick Cameron.

Mr Cameron argues that, if Australia is to remain competitive as a major beef exporter with South America and the US, the northern beef industry must speed up genetic gain via all available AB technologies.

Last year, he and cattle breeding consultant Don Nicol travelled to South America to benchmark Nindooindah's program.

"We just couldn't do that in Australia, because what they are doing in South America is so far beyond what we, as an industry, are even attempting," he said.

Since summer 2006, Nindooindah has mated 9057 head through embryo transfer and artificial insemination. Their conception rate over the past 26 transfer programs to date is 59pc. Last year 1141 embryos were transferred with an average conception rate over four ET programs of 70.25pc.

Mr Cameron said his ultimate goal was to lift economies of scale to a point where an embryo's cost would be about equal to that of a straw of semen.

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He is particularly proud of their donor program. Last November Nindooindah flushed 50 of their top heifers, harvesting an average of eight embryos from each and then implanting the 400 embryos into recipient cows, which will calve later this year.

The donor heifers were then artificially inseminated.

"So when you think about it, those donor heifers will have their lifetime's production on the ground before they've even had their first calf," he said.

"That's really punching it out



Ultrablack heifers on the lush pasture of Nindooindah.

and pushing the envelope, but it's that level of intensity that we need to be at to stay close to our overseas competitors."

Founded on Angus and Brangus genetics, the centrepiece of Nindooindah's operation is the evolution of its Ultrablack program. Ultrablacks are relatively new to Australia but have grown increasingly popular in the southern states of the US, particularly in Texas over the past decade.

The Ultrablack males and females at Nindooindah are carefully blended crosses by register-

ed Brangus (3/8 Brahman content) sires out of registered Angus cows. The result is a black, polled, sleek-coated animal with 3/16 Brahman and 13/16 Angus content. The 3/16 Brahman blood confers heat resistance while humps and ears are minimal, making them eligible for MSA programs.

From an animal welfare standpoint, their polled heads help crossbreeding programs that aim to breed the horns off future progeny. The base for the Ultrablacks is a herd of 600-plus of

the top performance-recorded Angus females in the country mated or flushed to semen from trait-leading US Brangus sires, mainly from the famous Brinks Brangus program in Texas.

The maternal backbone of Nindooindah's Ultrablack program has come from the purchase of 650 herd book registered stud cows from Lawson Angus in Yea, Victoria, in 2009. The females for March 23 are a cross section of the herd from that transaction to make room for the many progeny Nindooindah has following.

INDUSTRY WARNED:

'Northern R&D crisis'

SCIENTISTS, bureaucrats and beef producers have met in Brisbane for crucial talks in a bid to reset the research priorities of Australia's northern beef industry.

North Australia Beef Research Council chairman Ralph Shannon (pictured) says the industry's R&D system faces a crisis if urgent steps are not taken to match research projects to the changing commercial realities of Australia's northern beef zone.

Mr Shannon said that despite enormous changes to the way livestock have been bred, managed and marketed

in the past 25 years, little had changed in research priorities for northern Australia during the same period.

As a result, he believes, productivity gains still have not kept pace with costs of production increases, and many producers are experiencing one of their worst financial times in memory, as testified by Terry McCosker's Northern Beef Situation Analysis published in 2009.

"Leading herds are now performing much better than 20 years ago, but there is still great variation. We are certainly now much better



informed as to reasons for poor performance, with things like inter-calving intervals now on everyone's lips, and sub three-year-old Jap ox being common," he said.

"Grazing systems are far better understood, and

available legumes widely integrated into pasture systems. Notable, however, is the decline in RD&E funding and, therefore, the capability to deliver future innovation, in this space."

Mr Shannon said discussion

in the past 12 months noted that R&D projects in northern Australia had been largely short term, narrow-outcome in focus and largely technical and low impact.

"There is some sympathy for the view that the increase in accountability for research dollars over the past 20 years has biased the system away from more provocative, blue sky research into short-term projects," he said.

"In addition, the aging researcher population working in the RD&E field may be seen to be less likely to take risks than a younger cohort – if a younger cohort was available."

Mr Shannon said it was imperative that any research projects in the mix were guided by younger researchers

prepared to take risks, even if the immediate gains were small but bolstered research capacity in the longer term.

"In southern Australia, the ability of the private sector through consultants especially, has been a significant means of preserving capacity," he said.

"In northern Australia, the lack of consultants results in a vacuum in many areas, and creates a reliance on state and territory government provision of these services."

Mr Shannon's comments are in a discussion paper delivered in Brisbane yesterday, seeking feedback in a bid to capture future R&D priorities for the region. He said finding a sustainable way forward was an urgent task.

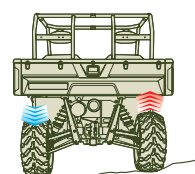
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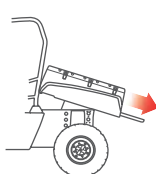
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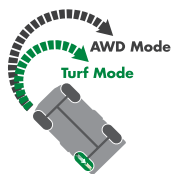
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