

Ultrablacks targeting MSA



By **BRAD COOPER**

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A TEAM of beef geneticists, breeding specialists and no-nonsense cattlemen on a southern Queensland property are hailing the emergence of a new tropically adapted Angus-based composite that promises to greatly expand the footprint of Angus-derived genetics across large parts of northern Australia.

The development of the 'Ultrablack' composite comes as commercial cattlemen in northern Australia look to elevate meat quality and fertility traits through the incorporation of black cattle, but still have reservations about the use of Angus herd bulls because of their limited ability to handle the tough conditions.

The opportunity coincides with a renewed emphasis on meat quality traits across the Australian beef industry, with programs like MSA now grading close to 1.5 million bodies annually, and attracting significant market premiums for compliance.

Momentum is now growing in the development and adoption of a more adapted Angus-based composite called Ultrablack, designed for use as herd bulls in extensive areas throughout Queensland and northern Australia.

The first-generation Ultrablack cattle being bred at Nindooibah, near Beaudesert, are based on US Brangus bulls carrying three-eighths Indicus content, used over high-quality Angus females to deliver a calf-carrying three-16ths (18.75 percent) Indicus content, and 81.25pc Angus.

Over time, as the composite stabilises and the population grows, breeding will shift more to Ultrablack x Ultrablack matings. The first 450 of these embryos have already been implanted in recipient females.

Nindooibah general manager Nick Cameron said the small Indicus infusion in Ultrablacks delivered an animal with a slick coat and elevated environmental adaptation to handle the north's hot conditions and variable nutrition.

"They also have a little more leg under them to get across the country. They also offer the potential to significantly improve fertility and benefit maternal hybrid vigour in those herds where the first-cross heifer progeny are retained," he said.

"Based on extensive carcass scanning results from the herd's genetic improve-



Nindooibah general manager Nick Cameron, Beaudesert, says the small Indicus infusion in Ultrablacks delivers an animal with a slick coat and elevated environmental adaptation to handle the north's hot conditions and variable nutrition.

ment program, carcass and meat quality attributes are very comparable to a straight-bred Angus animal."

While small, isolated pockets of Ultrablack bulls have already appeared in a few bull sale catalogues in Australia over the past year or two, Euan Murdoch's

We see them filling an important role in southern and western Qld.

Nindooibah enterprise, incorporating one of Australia's largest and best developed artificial breeding centres an hour's drive south-west of Brisbane, has embraced the composite in a far more significant way.

This season alone, Nindooibah is carrying out an ET program across 1500 recipient females, and is producing a similar number of AI calves, across a number of breeds. The scale of the enterprise means it can greatly accelerate the genetic progress being made, and generate large numbers of elite Ultrablack calves in a relatively short time frame.

The genetic building blocks for the program started with the purchase of 650 high-performance stud Angus cows,

mostly A and B drop, bought from Lawsons Angus, one of Australia's pre-eminent Angus breeders, out of Yea, Victoria.

"These heavily performance-recorded females provide an excellent maternal background, and include an elite group of about 50 donor cows used in a large-scale ET program," Mr Cameron said.

"The Angus females are being mated or flushed using semen from trait-leading US Brangus sires, mainly from the famous Brinks Brangus or Camp Cooley programs in Texas. These sires have been selected with a strong emphasis for carcass yield, marbling and fertility traits."

The first 220 selected heifer progeny from these matings will be offered at Nindooibah's inaugural female sale, scheduled to take place on-property next month on March 23. Their male siblings will feature in the inaugural Nindooibah bull sale (Ultrablack, Angus and Brangus) set down for October 5.

The Ultrablack heifer portion being prepared for sale now will be around 18 months at sale time, PTIC to Angus, Ultrablack and Brangus bulls.

All will be registered with Angus Breedplan, on the society's Multi-Breed Register, with a full suite of EBVs for production and meat quality traits – as would typically be seen in an extensively measured Angus seedstock herd.

The female sale will also include about 120 PTIC stud Lawson Angus

females, ranging in age from four to nine years, including elite donor cows in the top 5pc of EBVs for the Angus breed.

One of the first large-scale

commercial cattlemen to zone in on the Ultrablack as a herd bull option is Peter Hughes, whose Georgina Pastoral Company operates extensive breeding and growing properties on the Barkly Tableland, Tambo district and Channel Country in Queensland. Nindooibah has already contract-bred 300 Ultrablack herd bulls for use over Georgina Pastoral's extensive 50-75pc Indicus cross-bred females on 8500sq km Lake Nash, on the Barkly Tableland.

Mr Cameron said the Ultrablack composite would appeal to commercial cattlemen across large areas of Queensland and northern Australia.

"We see them filling an important role both in southern and western Queensland and in those zones further north where Angus bulls struggle. But equally, in the more extreme breeding areas of the far north where nutrition is poor and conditions much tougher, Brangus bulls will still play a role," he said.

Well-known beef genetics and breeding consultant Don Nicol has worked closely with Nindooibah in the development of the first Ultrablack composites.

"In my opinion, the Ultrablack program at Nindooibah combines the best genetics that the Angus and Brangus breeds have to offer," he said.

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