

Tasmanian beef shines at national carcass competition

An entry from Tasmania has won the reserve champion award in the national beef carcass competition held as part of the Beef 2009 event in Rockhampton.

It came from an Angus Hereford cross heifer that was bred on Flinders Island, finished at Aeon's Tasmania Feedlot Pty Ltd near Launceston and exhibited by the Greenham Pastoral Company which is linked to the family's Smithton processing operation.

The competition involved around 500 cattle representing 157 exhibitors from Queensland, New South Wales, Western Australia and Tasmania. It is Australia's only truly national beef carcass competition and is held every three years.

Peter Greenham said the award was a great result for the Tasmanian beef industry. "We've been strongly of the view that Tasmanian beef is a world class product and that's the feedback we're getting from our overseas markets. Doing so well against such a large number of interstate competitors proves the point.

"The reserve champion carcass came from the cattle we entered in the heavy trade grain fed class. They weren't hand-picked, just drawn from a regular run of cattle through the works.

"They were milk tooth and slaughtered at 13-14 months, averaging 280 kg carcass weight. They got AusMeat marbling scores of 3s and a 2 - surprisingly high for such young cattle. That says a lot about their breeding and the feeding regime," Mr Greenham added.

"We bought them as stores and had them fed specifically for domestic and Japanese markets where they go to Jusco, one of the biggest supermarket chains in Japan."

Mr Greenham said the trade had started slowly with the chain only taking a limited selection of cuts but the number had increased and he was expecting to be providing semi sets shortly.

"These cattle are lighter than traditional export types but they are sold by Jusco under a private brand, which is clean and green yearling label that guarantees no hormone growth promotants are used, and that all feed is GM free.

"This is where Tasmania has a real advantage with its HGP and GM free status. These specific cattle are grain fed but our grass fed program is also getting a big boost from the state's clean, green credentials. Our Cape Grim and Tasmania Natural brands are developing a great reputation in upper end retail and food service," Mr Greenham said.

Jusco's representative at the feedlot, Akira Miyamura, said Japanese consumers were recognizing the Tasmanian difference. "They really understand that Tasmania is different from the rest of Australia and has a wonderful environment for food production.

"They are quickly developing an appreciation of the flavour that is unique to Tasmanian beef," he said.

Breeder of the star carcass, Philip Edge manager of the 10,000 ha Markarna Grazing Company property on Flinders Island, said he was ecstatic at hearing that one of his heifers had done so well at Rockhampton.

"We're always striving to improve our breeding and management practices, and we're still developing and improving this country - there's more to be got out of it yet. It's great to see that we are doing it right."

Mr Edge said the winning heifer was by a Te Mania bull. "We're now using predominantly Te Mania sires over our 1650 breeders and run a combination of straight Angus and Angus Hereford crosses.

"The focus has always been on King Island - this shows that Flinders Island produces great beef too. Perhaps we should develop Flinders Island as a brand," Mr Edge added with a laugh.

Tasmania Feedlot managing director, Andrew Thompson, was also 'pretty stoked' with his significant role in producing the carcass. "The prestige of the achievement took a while to sink in," he said.

"We are Japanese owned and our primary role is to produce top-quality beef for the Jusco chain. We only feed cattle that are Tasmanian born and bred - that ensures the HGP and GM free status required by Jusco.

"And in addition we never use any antibiotics and of course, animal protein feeds are completely out of the question."

Mr Thompson said the Greenham heifers had been on feed for about 75 days before transport to Smithton for processing. The company mixed all its own feed and tried to source as much as possible from Tasmanian suppliers.

"We have to bring some grain from the mainland but everything else is local - all roughage for example, and we also use local potato by-product. It's a very good replacement for grain."

The feedlot employs 42 staff and has operated for 30 years on the same site.
