

Making the grade in Tasmania

'Tasmania' and 'grassfed' are two points of difference for marketing the beef brands sold by Apple Isle processor Greenham, and they are supported by a third-grading under Meat Standards Australia.

Greenham's two beef labels, 'Cape Grim' and 'Greenham Tasmania Natural Beef', leverage Tasmania's singular strength – the perception that the island's isolation and climate lend a truly 'clean, green' tinge to its farm products – while hurdling a potential weakness, the island's limited beef feedlotting capability, by focusing on grassfed product.

Grassfed beef has in the past been tarnished by the unreliability of the eating experience. By using MSA to ensure guaranteed eating quality, Greenham has been able to stack grassfed onto its environmental credentials, while delivering guaranteed quality and consistency.

To consolidate the marketing story, the labels also promise beef free of growth promotants, antibiotics and genetically modified organisms – the latter another unique Tasmanian marketing ploy, as the island has banned GMO crops.

Peter Greenham Junior said the strategy has worked remarkably well.

"We started building our grassfed brands in November 2007, starting out with 100–200 bodies a week, and we're now putting through 1,000–1,100 a week," Mr Greenham said. By January, he said, that figure would be 1,200–1,400.

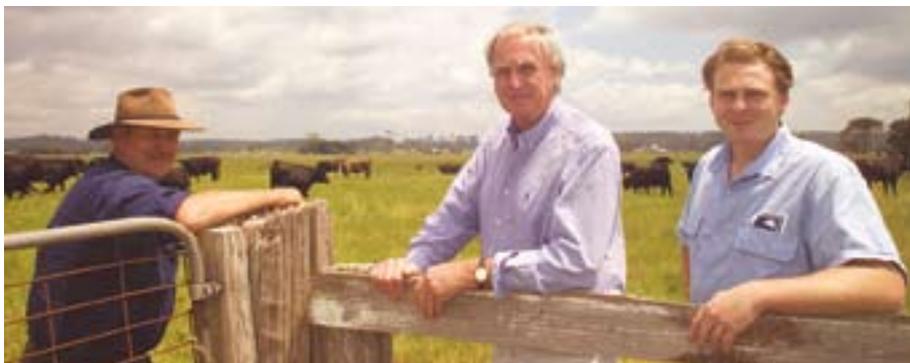
Greenham Tasmania Natural Beef, a yearling product, is sold into the NSW and Queensland markets. MSA is used to grade the product to the top six MSA grading groups.

"We started building our grassfed brands in November 2007, starting out with 100–200 bodies a week, and we're now putting through 1,000–1,100 a week."

The Cape Grim brand, which bones to the top four groups, is based exclusively on grassfed bullocks. The product is sold through giant Korean supermarket retailer Lotte Mart, into Japan, and across the domestic market.

MSA science is used to screen bullocks supplied to the Cape Grim label, with marbling, colour and consistent tenderness leading the list of desirable criteria.

"We changed the specifications of ossification, for instance, and that ruled out some of the older bullocks that we'd been taking because the meat can't reach the eating grade quickly enough," Mr Greenham said.



MSA producer Les Porteus with Peter Snr and Peter Jnr Greenham from HW Greenham & Sons Pty Ltd.

Father-and-son operation

The network of 60-plus producers who supply Cape Grim bullocks play their part in meeting the management part of the MSA program.

"We have meetings twice a year, when we invite all the producers down to Smithton (Greenham's home town) and show them how to get their grading results."

For Les and Troy Porteus, a father-and-son operation that has traditionally supplied Greenham with 1,200 bullocks a year, the program has delivered a handy premium on stock that meet the Cape Grim criteria, with very little overhead.

"We're now supplying nearly 900 head to the MSA program," said Les Porteus. "There was very little extra we had to do – we've always ensured that there's feed ahead of the stock, and when there's not, we hand feed."

Mr Greenham said that the Porteus's management, with its focus on a consistent plane of nutrition, is delivering a remarkable 98% MSA pass rate on their heavy, marbled bullocks.

Into the USA

Now that Greenhams has consolidated its labels, its supplier base and its marketing story, its next objective is to open up further markets overseas, especially for non-loin cuts.

The processor is now pushing its Cape Grim label into the east coast of the United States, where MLA Business Development Manager, Stephen Edwards, is working on selling the grassfed message in a country where nearly all beef is grainfed.

"Grassfed is gaining popularity as a niche product in up-market foodservice and retail establishments," Mr Edwards said.

"Premiums are not being seen yet but with the product being underpinned by Eating Quality

Assured (EQA, the export name for MSA), there's the potential for premiums down the road."

The US is a complicated market to sell into, Mr Edwards said, and has become even more challenging with the recent financial meltdown.

"But the Tasmanian story is strong, and when EQA is explained to the American chefs they are very interested."

MORE INFORMATION

Belinda Roseby, MLA

Phone: 07 3620 5216

Email: broseby@mla.com.au

Peter Greenham Junior, Greenham

Email: peterw@greenham.com.au

HOW IS MSA GRADED?

MSA certified graders collate information from the producer, supervise processing standards and collect individual carcass attributes using a uniform set of standards.

Individual beef carcass attributes collected include breed content, meat colour, fat depth, marbling, maturity and ultimate pH. Results are allocated to the carcass including individual primal quality grades, days of ageing required and recommended cooking method.