



# MAKING THE MOST OF FLINDERS ISLAND OPPORTUNITIES

Many people reflect upon the direction of their lives when they are on holiday. Time away from the routines of work and home provide an opportunity to consider change. Perhaps it's a new job, new home or even moving to a new area.

Usually these thoughts evaporate for most of us when we return to the daily grind with life continuing as it had before.

But for Penny and David Conn, and their three children, a holiday on Flinders Island 10 years ago was indeed a life changing experience.

The dairy farming family from near Welshpool in Victoria's South Gippsland fell in love with the place and decided they would move to the Island, and into beef.

They purchased a property almost immediately and leased it out while continuing to run the dairy enterprise. "The lease covered the interest," David said.

## BIG MOVE

Another purchase followed and five years ago they moved to Flinders Island, leaving the dairy farm in the capable hands of share farmers.

More land was purchased recently lifting the holding to 1320 ha. They'll calve down 1050 cows this year and turnoff 750 head, while aiming for an eventual output of 1200 head per year.

Penny says they are still in build up phase and getting their systems in place. "It's hard to get numbers up at this stage. We even bought some from King Island last year."

The Conns have applied their dairying experience to the beef industry and have set up a rotational grazing system.

"We move cattle every three or four days," David said. "It's nowhere near as intensive as on the dairy farm where the cows can be moved twice a day."

## ROTATIONAL GRAZING WORKS

"We find it works. We're getting better pastures and it's easy to manage feed ahead of the herd."



STOCK AGENT DARREN GRACE WHO HANDLES MOST OF THE CATTLE ON FLINDERS ISLAND, LEFT, WITH DAVID CONN.

Our aim is to bring the cattle in at the three leaf ryegrass stage but we are finding it hard to get above two leaves.

"We're looking for that wedge of feed ahead of the cattle."

"It's very much a long-term program. At times we do question it, calving time for example, but I'm confident we'll be able to carry more stock down the track. Our big aim is to turn off a beast per hectare per year," David said.

"There's a fair bit of capital involved in the initial set up and it takes time, but we're sure it will pay off."

The cattle run on 16 ha blocks in mobs of 250 to 260 and rotated from paddock to paddock using a laneway system.

Electric fencing is used extensively, normally with two hot wires and two neutral. The Conns say moving the cattle is an easy exercise. It's largely a matter of opening and closing gates and only takes a few hours.

"When we go on holidays we just set a schedule for whoever's looking after farm, and it works well," Penny added.

## EASY WATER

Water is supplied from bores via 50 mm piping to troughs in each paddock. One of the many things David likes about Flinders Island is the easy access to water.

"We're getting good water at 8 m. Over in Victoria we had to go down 120 m."

The herd is predominantly Angus. Most of the turnoff goes to Greenham with cull cows and heifers going straight to Smithton, and feeder steers via the feedlots with an entry weight of 450 to 500 kg.

David Conn points out that his family has had a long association with Greenham. "My father used to sell four day old dairy calves and cull bull calves to Peter Greenham's father when the company was Gilbertson-Greenham. It was a respected company."

## LONG HAUL WITH GREENHAM

"I like the way that Greenham Tasmania is in for the long haul, like us. We really value the relationship they build up with farmers. We're all in this together. We have to produce a product that the end consumer wants to buy. That's how it worked in dairy, and beef has to work the same way."

"We are keen to know what type of cattle Greenham want, and really value the workshops they run to pass on this information."

"Then we try to buy bulls that will give us that result. All the studs we buy from are

Tasmanian – Rosedale, Cluden Newry, Land Fall and Antu.

"Making sure everybody in the production chain is in sync guarantees a good future for the industry," David said. "That's where Greenham are doing such a great job."

Darren Grace is the Roberts agent on Flinders Island and handles all of Penny and David Conn's cattle for Greenham. He says Flinders Island produces great cattle and is slowly gaining a reputation but 'we still live in the shadow of King'.

## NUMBERS INCREASING

"Numbers are increasing here and you can put some good lines of cattle together. We've now got 13% of Tasmania's breeders," he said.

The Conns love the Flinders Island environment and say it's the perfect place to bring up their children Gabby, Jim and Jillian. They have no problem with the isolation – there is always plenty to do – and usually travel off the island about every six weeks.

Penny says people who are into shopping would struggle with Flinders Island but she is very happy with her three visits to Melbourne each year.

David said he had never thought they would have the opportunity to expand as they have. "We certainly couldn't have done it staying in Gippsland. Jim is very keen on the farm. It's great to be building something that he might be able to take over some day."



We are currently spending several million dollars to upgrade our Smithton plant and increase throughput.

Most of the work involves the boning room and chillers but also includes a new boiler.

More details in the next issue.



PENNY AND DAVID CONN WITH THEIR CHILDREN GABBY, JIM AND JILLIAN.