

## PLANNING KEY TO PLANT UPGRADE

For Dale Billing and his crew at Smithton, work projects don't come any bigger than the military-style operation required to get last year's \$2.5 million plant upgrade off the ground, then wrapped up, in the tightest schedule imaginable.

The huge project was more than a year in the planning, but had to be done and dusted in two weeks.

Dale, 44, is the maintenance manager at Smithton and heads a team of six fitters and electricians.

"They are a very good crew," Dale says. "Without them, I couldn't do what I do.

"My basic role is to make sure the plant runs as efficiently as we can get it to run, in all aspects from refrigeration to boning, slaughtering, by-products, waste water and environmental issues.

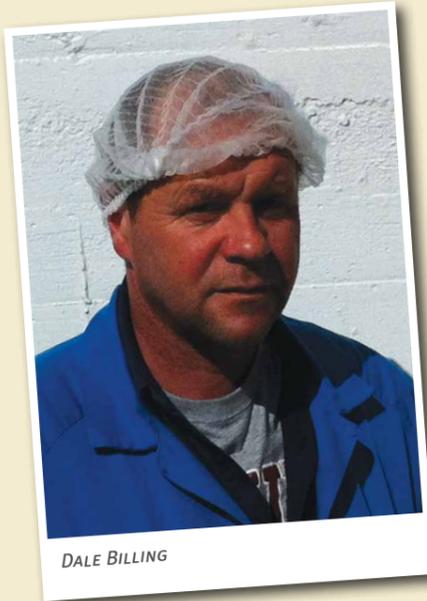
"It's very broad and it's a pretty full-time job – six or seven days a week. You're on call basically 24/7, but that's what happens in this industry – I'm sure all other abattoirs are the same.

Dale says last year's plant upgrade was "a massive job".

"We started planning it 12 or 18 months before, working with Peter senior and Peter junior, who both had a fair bit of input into it," he says.

"We ran through lots of different plans, working with contractors to find out the best way to go about it.

"All that time we were preparing for our two-week window – they gave us that time slot, but we had to be careful, because we still had meat orders to fill, farmers still wanted to sell cattle and you've got to keep people in work.



DALE BILLING

"We had two weeks and we did it in two weeks. It was a huge job to do in that time, though – a lot of concrete walls had to come out. We had to take everything out, then put everything back in again.

"Sometimes, we were working up to 16 hours a day.

"We had so much to get done, with so many people in such a small area – it was to everyone's credit that it went through in a fortnight and it all came together well in the end.

"People who've come in since have been amazed at how much change there was and how we got the job done in just two weeks."

Dale is a true-blue local who has a clear picture of what the abattoir means to the town and surrounding area.

"I was born and bred in Smithton," he says.

"I started working after school at Marthick's welding works in 1983, then began an apprenticeship there in '84.

"I left there in 1988 to come to the abattoirs, when Blue Ribbon first purchased it, and I've been here ever since.

"The company is very good – the money they have put into this district has been unbelievable.

"We've lost McCain's, the forestry industry is not going real good and Gunns are shutting, so, for the district's sake, this place has to go well.

"It's got to make money."



Tasmanian

## MEATWORKS MESSENGER

SEPTEMBER 2011

GREENHAM



## COMPLETION OF PLANT UPDATE LIFTS CAPACITY

Plant capacity has increased by 40% following completion of our major expansion project. We can now process up to 450 head per day compared with the previous limit of 320.

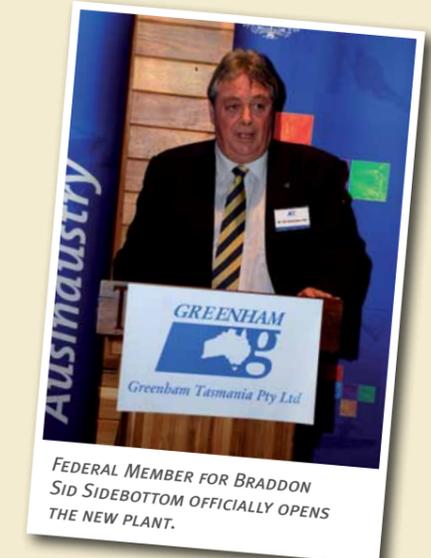
It represents a multimillion dollar investment by the company supported by a \$1.13 million grant from the state and federal governments as part of the North West and Northern Tasmania Innovation and Investment Fund.

The bulk of the money has gone into a major upgrade of the boning room, bringing it up to the latest and most efficient standards.

Manual handling has been reduced with the introduction of boosted conveyor systems that speed the flow of carcasses as they are broken down.

Other improvements included increased chiller capacity, a second Cryovac packaging machine along with extra vacuum pumps, and a new boiler to boost hot water and output.

Concrete walls were shifted to make more room and new stands were installed on the slaughter floor along with a new evisceration table and x-ray machines.



FEDERAL MEMBER FOR BRADDON SID SIDEBOTTOM OFFICIALLY OPENS THE NEW PLANT.

The development was officially opened on July 19 by the Federal Member for Braddon Sid Sidebottom representing the Innovation Minister Senator Kim Carr. Managing director Peter Greenham hosted a tour of the new facilities for Mr Sidebottom and other dignitaries.

It's been an exciting time here at Greenham since we sent you our last newsletter.

### BRINGING HOME GOLD

Back in June our Cape Grim Beef took out a gold medal in the branded beef and lamb section of this year's Royal Queensland Food and Wine Show. The show is now one of the most comprehensive of its kind in Australia, and chief judge Russell Smith said the 2011 standard was exceptional.

Not only did we win the grass fed category but we were out in front by a country mile scoring 100 points ahead of second – 597.5 against 494.5.

Yet again it proves that Tasmanian farmers produce the best beef in Australia, and quite likely close to, if not, the best in the world. In fact, Russell Smith commented that the grass fed class would easily compete with the best of the best internationally.

The winning animal was fattened by Les Porteus on his property near Smithton.

### IN THE NEWS

A few weeks later in July we hosted the official opening of our plant extensions conducted by the member for Braddon Sid Sidebottom representing Innovation Minister Senator Kim Carr.

The event attracted strong media interest with a large contingent of reporters and invited guests touring the new boning room where they were able to see the efficiency gains first hand.

### CHALLENGING TIME FOR SALES

Winter has proven to be a challenging time for sales with consumer confidence taking a big dip. It isn't surprising with the constant barrage of bad news from the US and Europe, and the uncertainties of a new tax on the home front.

But these cycles always reverse and we are hoping that the coming warmer weather will stimulate a more positive outlook. And with all the rain to date supplying top quality beef won't be a problem.

Peter Greenham

## FERTILISERS AND INSECTICIDES CAN BE LETHAL

There are more than 40,000 chemicals approved for use in Australia, some of which are used in the agricultural industry to assist with growing and maintaining crops.

However, some of these chemicals, such as hydrogen peroxide, potassium nitrate, potassium chlorate and nitric acid, can be used to make home-made explosives.

In recent years, common chemicals have been successfully used by terrorists around the world to manufacture illegal bombs which have resulted in damage to property, mass casualties and fatalities.

For example, in Mumbai in 2006, terrorists attacked the suburban railway using bombs made from a chemical commonly used in fertiliser.

Investigations into previous terrorist activities around the world have shown it is common for terrorists to stockpile fertiliser.

In England in April, 2007, five men were found guilty of conspiring to cause explosions likely to endanger lives. During this investigation, 600kg of fertiliser was confiscated from a storage facility.

In the US, an investigation into the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing – one of the most destructive acts of terrorism on American soil – uncovered a stockpile of more than 2300kg of fertiliser.

You can help safeguard Australia from terrorism by:

- ensuring stocks of chemical compounds, particularly fertilisers and insecticides, are secure;

- undertaking regular stock audits and reporting discrepancies to the National Security Hotline (NSH) on 1800 123 400 and your local police, and;

- remaining vigilant and reporting suspicious activity, such as unusual stockpiling of chemicals, to the NSH on 1800 123 400.

Every piece of information gathered is important and could provide the missing link for security or intelligence operations – a 2005 terrorist plot in Australia was pieced together by information provided to the NSH by a chemical retailer.

For further information about chemicals of security concern, and hints about identifying suspicious activity, visit [www.australia.gov.au/chemicalsecurity](http://www.australia.gov.au/chemicalsecurity)

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# TOP QUALITY BEEF FROM TASMANIA'S MOST ISOLATED FARM

We all know that Tasmanian grass fed beef processed by Greenham is the best in the business. It won a gold medal at this year's Royal Queensland Food and Wine Show, and celebrity chef Neil Perry describes it as the best beef in Australia.

Its reputation results from superb pastures, a pristine environment, and a band of dedicated farmers who grow great cattle.

So when livestock manager Graeme Pretty tells *Meatworker* that the very best cattle passing through the plant consistently come from one farm, we decided it was time to go and have a look.

What came next was a real surprise – Donny and Royce Smith's property is on the coast west of Zeehan at Granville Harbour and undoubtedly the most isolated farm in Tasmania. Surely they can claim to have the cleanest farming environment on the planet?

Their nearest agricultural neighbour is over 100km away, not something you would expect to find in the island state!

The obvious question is how did a farm come to be established in the middle of Tasmania's wilderness?

## RED BASALT SOIL

Royce understands that it goes back to a soldier settlement program or something similar in the early years. What is now a 3000 acre holding was originally some 30 blocks, all of 99 acres. It is believed all were taken up but few if any worked.

But why here? One look at the ground provides the answer. The whole property is an isolated patch of red basalt soil that any farmer would be proud to call his own. The pioneers knew what they were doing when they pegged these 3000 acres.



SILAGE IS CRUCIAL IN GETTING THEIR CATTLE THROUGH WINTER. ROYCE AND DONNY PIT 2000 – 3000 TONNES ANNUALLY. BALING HAY IS SIMPLY IMPOSSIBLE DUE TO THE CONSTANT RAIN.

This was a time when Zeehan had a much bigger population which needed food. Hence the cattle drives down the west coast which involved swimming them across the Pieman River. From there the track took the cattle to Smith's property where they were rested, or even possibly held for fattening, before moving on to feed the hungry miners.

Royce's grandfather started leasing the land with a friend in the 1960s by which time the original blocks had been through various owners and had been consolidated into one.

## DOZING CONTRACTORS

Leasing turned to purchase and Donny and his brother-in-law took the friend's place in the partnership. The family lived in Zeehan until 1994 while developing and working the property part-time.

"We were dozing contractors, mainly," Royce says. "Dad had bought a '79 model Terex, probably the first in Tasmania, and then added a second one. They had the 6-71 GM motor which explains why I am a bit deaf!

"We used the dozers to clear the farm while selling blackwood logs off the block to a local sawmill. That worked out well – it helped cover costs."

Today over 2000 acres are under pasture, which after calving this year will host 1850 head.

The Smiths run 640 breeding cows and fatten 450 head annually after putting aside replacement heifers. Back in 1984 it was 300 breeders and the progeny were turned off as stores.

The herd was Hereford based but is moving towards Angus 'with a pinch of Simmental'.

"We haven't bought a bull for 20 years. We breed our own but it's mainly AI.

"I do 400 cows on the natural cycle which means running them in every day. We end up with 800 head all up in the yards but have a good drafting system and I can run them off in one and a half hours.

"It takes longer to get them in than it does to draft them."

Royce says he's tried various breeds including Charolais, Limousin and Murray Grey. "Limousin are hard to fatten and very toey – you have them bouncing off the rails – and the Greys don't have any size.

"I like Angus because the breeders are switched on and have plenty of performance data available. There are lots of bulls to choose from and they do well in this type of country.

"I buy straws from all over and we concentrate mainly on the 400 and 600 day weights. I don't worry too much about calving ease because I figure that a small calf becomes a small cow.

"Also, I don't rush after new bulls. I like to see how they are performing for a while first."

## ALEPH PIONEERS

Royce has used Stockbook software and his own management tags since 1999 and describes it as a good thing. He can trace both live weights and dressed weights back to sires.

All the Smith's cattle go to Greenham. "I reckon that Greenham is the best thing that has come into Tasmania," Royce says.

"All our cattle go through the Aleph program. I sent eight loads up during July.

"Our supplier number is 001. The first beef Greenham sent to Aleph came from our cattle.

"We're very happy with the program. We used to take them through to 380 to 400kg dressed weight but with Aleph, we unload them a bit earlier which means we can run a few more breeders.

"Most of ours go about 330kg but we had one recently that was 375kg at 23 months."

## ROTATIONAL GRAZING

Royce runs a rotational grazing system with the whole herd going around the place in 26 to 28 days. He generally rotates the yearlings ahead of the cows – whatever needs the most feed goes in first – and paddocks are grazed for no more than two days.

"It pugs up quickly here. You have to keep them moving. The average rainfall is 1500mm and we get every bit of it.

"We calve in mid-September, a bit later than normal. Our season is about six weeks behind the rest of Tassie."



THE SMITH'S ISOLATION MEANS THEY NEED TO BE COMPLETELY SELF-SUFFICIENT WHEN IT COMES TO PLANT AND EQUIPMENT. THEY EVEN HAVE THEIR OWN EXCAVATORS.

Pasture improvement has played a big role in improving productivity. Paddocks are disced up as required and sown down with red, white and sub clovers, and a couple of perennial ryes under a crop of turnips.

Royce has also started mixing in a bit of plantain. "It tests better than rye for feed value but doesn't handle pugging real well."

Single super has been spread for the last 30 years at 325kg per hectare and an application of lime was trialled recently. It gave a good response but with the nearest supply at Railton freight costs are a challenge.

## OWN EQUIPMENT

There is a closer source of coarse limestone but this would require the installation of a crushing plant which Royce says isn't out of the question. "It might be worth crunching the numbers. We are used to having all our own equipment here, even excavators.

"There are no contractors nearby and no neighbours to borrow from!"

Urea is applied to silage paddocks late in the season. Royce says he needs to feed out a lot of silage during the wettest winter months while growth is slow.

"We do two to three thousand cubic metres of pit silage in one big cut. It's probably more haylage than silage but keeps well. The clover is always just perfect.

"There's no way you would ever make hay here, you'd never get it cured. One thing we don't have to worry about is spring growth – it's guaranteed."

The silage is cut with a Krone 10 disc 3.8m mower and transported with a Krone R48 pickup wagon. The feed out wagon holds 17m<sup>3</sup> and puts out three to four loads a day during winter.

Royce credits his late grandfather with his decision to become a farmer. "He died at 93 and was still doing the books when he was 90. He trained me.

"When we left school all my mates went into mining, but my grandfather said how about just putting your finger in the pie and see if you like farming? It was the best thing he ever did."

That sentiment is easy to understand. These days Royce and his wife Lisa and their three children live on the highest point of Granville Farm with magnificent views out over the Southern Ocean and south to the lighthouse at Macquarie Harbour.

And the children's grandparents are within reach just a few hundred metres away, also with the same commanding views.



ROYCE IS A BIG FAN OF ROTATIONAL GRAZING. THE CATTLE SPEND NO MORE THAN TWO DAYS IN EACH Paddock AND ROTATE AROUND THE PROPERTY IN 26 TO 28 DAYS.