

Cattle Council Report

Scott Parry, ACV - CCA Rep.

Talk about having big shoes to fill... For those who may not know, I have recently taken on the late Alastair Henderson's position as ACV representative to CCA. This involves four face to face meetings a year as well as contributing to policy formulation and discussions throughout the year. From November 12 to 14 I attended the CCA AGM, Animal Health and Welfare Consultative Committee meeting and the CCA board meeting. This coincided with the RMAC and MLA producer forums and the MLA AGM, all of which I attended as an observer. Obviously a LOT of red meat industry issues were discussed over the three days - certainly far too many to cover in this report - but I have attempted to distil it down to some essential points that are of most relevance and significance to ACV.

1. Review of how the grass fed levies will be distributed and administered. For anyone following this story in the rural and mainstream press you will appreciate the complexities of the issue. In a nutshell there is a feeling from parts of industry that the grass fed levies aren't necessarily being spent the way that grass fed producers want them spent in terms of R & D and marketing. This principally impacts MLA, who receive the bulk of these levies directly at the moment. Consequently there has been a senate inquiry and Minister Joyce will, in the next few weeks make an announcement on what the new system will be, going forward. Whilst nothing is certain, the most likely outcome is that the levies will flow directly to a producer body very similar to CCA which will then distribute to service companies such as MLA and AHA to spend. The theory being that by re directing the levy money through a producer body (rather than an R and D and marketing company such as MLA), the outcomes from the spend will more accurately reflect the needs and desires of the grass fed industry. Confused? A lot of people are and my apologies if this explanation is not 100% correct or over simplified. Main message for ACV members is that we may see some change in direction for MLA funded activities in the future.
2. Review of National BJD Policy. Largely in the wake of the Queensland/Rockley BJD case, CCA is taking a lead on a review of the national BJD strategy. The timeline is that the review process will run during the first half of next year with final implementation of the policy hopefully scheduled for early 2016. ACV members will obviously be impacted by this as we are often at the sharp end of BJD diagnosis, control and eradication. ACV will be asked to directly nominate one member to be part of the main review panel.

Other organisations that will contribute members to this panel include Dairy Australia, ARCBA, MLA and a few others. It is important that we get the right person for this job and that they make their voice and the views of ACV/AVA heard and that the new policy has a strong dose of science and practicality mixed into it.

3. National Arbovirus Monitoring Program Funding. By the time this goes to print the ink will have just about dried on the new China - Australia FTA. Consequences for the cattle industries (both beef and dairy) are significant, with beef tariffs being steadily reduced to zero over 9 years. Dairy likewise will have tariffs abolished over the next few years. Whilst the early talk was of a million live cattle going into China as soon as the FTA was signed, anyone with any understanding of the industry knows that this was pretty fanciful talk. Realistically, the industry may get to 30 or 40000 pretty quickly and who knows where from there, but regardless, it is a positive sign. However, for anyone who has had anything to do with sending live cattle into China already, you will understand how important Bluetongue is in China. This is all a longwinded way of saying that the NAMP will assume even greater significance due to the anticipated increase in live cattle trade to China. Until recently, NAMP funding has been somewhat strained and uncertain. However in light of recent events, Livecorp have agreed to chip in some money to NAMP, guaranteeing its ongoing existence.
4. Antibiotic resistance is still very much on the agenda for the industry. ACV needs to stay on the front foot in terms of contributing to the discussion, making sure we keep a seat at the table where the discussion is being had and promoting responsible use of antibiotics in our everyday work.
5. Real time FMD training. Several ACV members have been fortunate enough to take part in these courses in Nepal over the last two years. The good news is, several more courses will run through the back end of 2014 and through 2015. The bad news is, organisations that want to send people on these courses will now have to meet all in country costs (course fees, accommodation, meals etc) as well as transport costs to and from Nepal. Until now, DAFF has met the in country costs. It is estimated that in country costs will be around \$4500 AUD (plus however many Himalaya Lagers you consume at the bar...) Still, in the scheme of things, an excellent investment in the future biosecurity of our industry and our country.

6. New national biosecurity legislation will replace the existing AQIS act. This is currently being formulated and reviewed. CCA are involved, but details still sketchy. Watch this space.
7. Industry QA programs for biosecurity, food safety and animal welfare. There is a lot of talk at industry level regarding the issue of how production claims pertaining to these three big issues can be documented and substantiated to the satisfaction of the consumer and then translated into tangible benefits for the red meat industry. The topic regularly is raised at ACV meetings as well. From my recent observations, there are a number of players in the field at present including - processors, retailers, LBN, CCA and state governments. There are some excellent concepts out there and some appear to be making some headway in industry. However the main issues that any of these programs face include:
 - » How do you get enough producers to sign on to a program to give it credibility? Retailers and processors tend to get the best compliance rates due to the pressure they can exert on producers to join. Bodies like ACV, CCA and LBN have some interest in getting QA schemes up and running but at present they may struggle to attract enough buy in from producers as they offer no immediate tangible benefits of membership.
 - » Auditing and compliance requirements and costs. To be credible, any QA scheme needs to have a solid audit process. This costs money and this tends to annoy producers who feel as though they are footing the bill but not getting any financial return on their investment.
8. Media campaign to promote the red meat and wider farming industries. There was a lot of talk about the perceived need for the red meat industries to look into a co-ordinated media campaign to strengthen their image and consumer confidence in their product and production claims. The talk quickly got around to the fact that this probably needs to be looked at from a multi commodity view point that includes all sectors of the farming industries. I found this fascinating in light of the fact that AVA and ACV are currently exploring and planning around a similar issue. Most of the concerns that we as a profession have regarding how the consumer views us are shared by the red meat industry as well. One of the comments to come out of the discussion when I raised this fact at the CCA Board meeting was that all stakeholders in the primary industries, including AVA/ACV should be looking at ways to co-operate on this issue, as there seems to be a lot of common ground for all of us. Fascinating concept - challenge being how to progress it.

That's all for now. Until next year, I wish all ACV members and families a happy, healthy, safe and above all rain soaked 2015.

Regards,

Scott Parry
ACV - CCA Rep.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor

Thought it was worth sharing the highlights of 'Brahman Week' held in Rocky over the last 3 days. Whilst an annual event, it draws a very large contingent of sellers from right along the Qld coast and buyers from Australia over.

Of 727 bulls to make the the ring averaging \$6,492 with 97% clearance, 307 Reds averaged \$6,617 and 96% (top \$44,000), 417 Greys hit \$6,656 at 97% (top \$64,000). Fair to say, surprising results all round given the prolonged season, national herd size and lack of cash. Perhaps driven by anticipation for things to come but nonetheless, a good boost for spirits amongst rural folk at present.

One thing that did stand out for me personally though, was the VBBSE summary and supplementary emailed out to Brahman clients prior to the sale. It is rare to have such an array of same breed bulls on the one sheet with weight, age, scrotals and motilities for perusal.

Whilst the Brahman Association now requires assessing vets to be ACV accredited, there would appear quite an alarming discrepancy between motilities when broken down into studs and thus on an individual assessor level.

It was noted by a few present that some very high progressive motilities seemed a little 'extraordinary', whilst some studs appeared to perhaps have an Angus infusion with 90-95 plus PM% across the entire stud line.

At the risk of sounding cynical, this is a matter which is sure to surface at next year's Beef Week held in Rockhampton and something that perhaps needs to be addressed in one manner or another to ensure both consistency and thus credibility within the scheme.

Personally, I am constantly intrigued on occasion when perceived creamy samples have appeared to have quite high motilities until I've diluted them out and am able to give a count of progressives on 10 cells at one layer thick rather than a view of 'boiling rice' only to find them made up of a few extremely aggressive little tackers outswimming the dead (and nudging a few with them). Likewise when I've had the microscope light going flat, it has made an objective evaluation just as difficult sometimes.

A client a few weeks ago was very disheartened when I told him one bull was below 60% motile on 3 collections and a retest was no better, resorting that 'perhaps a better microscope would give a better motility'? Certainly made me chuckle when thinking about some older field scopes I've looked down and only seen swirling dust!

I have certainly become very appreciative of the need to consider the temperatures across all in contact surfaces, formalin, diluents and pipettes, even as we head into above 30 degree days, not to mention a good microscope with a clean view!

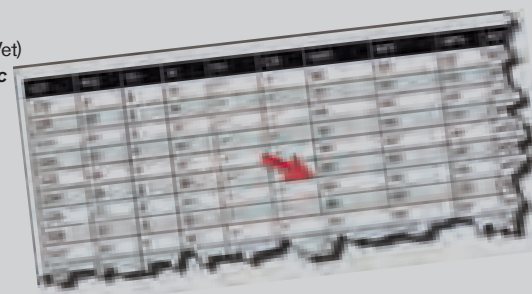
Whilst best endeavours have been made to standardise the VBBSE process, are there a set of looped videos or that like that we can compare against for the various percentages?

On a further side, it is good to see a few studs taking up the optional morphology in what is seen as a bit of a gamble for people selling both young bulls and those fresh off 'feed'. I have had many a discussion with clients on the benefits but am more often than not restricted to paddock bulls for the risk of having a bull fail a few weeks before sale!

If nothing else, someone is sure to come up with an iPhone app to assist soon enough..

Certainly looking forward to seeing as many if you as possible at Beef Week in a few months!

Neil (the Farmer/Vet)
Neil Farmer BVSc



[Editor's note – the Bull subcommittee is looking at this very problem, and you will see some online resources to show how to measure motility soon. We'll also remove the number (%) from the VBBSE certificates as it doesn't add any value if it's adequate. As an example, look at the bulls below from a supplementary list emailed to all who attended the sale. Morphology wasn't tested, and the motility number is listed as if it were as important as the scrotal circumference... A tick here similar to the PH (physical) and CSE (crush side evaluation), or indeed complete removal of the data would seem prudent!]