

Sprouts lift carrying capacity

AT A GLANCE:

■ The Dendle family run 250 breeders and progeny with an additional 200-plus head finishing operation at 900ha Jamar, Yamala in Central Queensland.

■ Carrying capacity and weight gains have dramatically increase with the installation of an on-property Fodder Factory which converts 1kg of barley seed into 10kg of 17pc protein feed within seven days.

Story and pictures by **LISA YORKSTON**

A METHOD of producing supplementary feed on-property has dramatically increased the carrying capacity of a family grazing enterprise in Central Queensland.

Brad Dendle, Jamar, Yamala said the Fodder Factory allowed the family to finish an extra 220 head annually on the 909ha breeding property east of Emerald. The factory was purchased after a trip to the Orange field days and was first fired up in April 2000.

Mr Dendle said an initial line of 120 European cross heifers were fed on a combination of the barley sprouts and buffel pasture for three months and gained up to 1.6kg per day. However the next mob of heifers, about 80 head bought from the coast in July, gained only 1.1kg/day due to a combination of less available pasture during winter and the time needed to adapt to the inland, he said.

"They put on a lot of weight but they still had to fill out," he said.

Yet despite the performance of the coastal heifers, the Dendles held the line in high regard and retained 16 head as part of the 250-strong herd of Brahman cross breeders and progeny already on Jamar.

Another change on the cards at Jamar is a



Brad Dendle, pictured with Neville Moloney from Philip Black Auctioneers, turns off an additional 220 head each year thanks to on-property supplementary feed production.

strong focus on the Santa Gertrudis breed and the recent introduction of Angus sires.

Mr Dendle said while some Brahman content would be retained, the European infusion would translate into improved weight gain.

Progeny would also be better suited for finishing with the Fodder Factory which, once set up, was simple and time effective, he said.

Kept at a constant 22 degrees Celsius with air-conditioning and heaters installed, the

facility operates on a seven-day system to turn 1kg of barley seed into about 10kg of green feed with more than 17pc protein for the stock.

Each day, 120 trays each containing about 10kg of sprouts are fed out and then recharged from the on-site 35t silo, the entire process taking about an hour.

By the time the seven-day cycle is completed, the grain has sprouted to about 15cm (six inches) in height, ready to feed out again. "It's been really good for us - it gives us an extra couple of hundred head (carrying capacity)," Mr Dendle said.

"The factory has the capacity to feed 100 head at three-quarter supplementation."

The seed is placed in trays and irrigated through a dripper system powered by a pressure pump with the 22,730L (5000 gallon) tank providing water for three months of operation, up to 250L per day.

"We probably use a little more water (than southern operators) because we have to irrigate more frequently due to the heat," Mr Dendle said.

Further south, the sprouting grain might be watered every six hours but on Jamar, the trays are watered every four hours. To ensure there is no wastage, excess water runs off the concrete floor and into storage for re-use. Feed wastage has also been eliminated as stock eat the entire plant including the palatable feed roots.

"We were told it would take four or five days before the cattle would be fully on it but we found they went for it straight away," Mr Dendle said.

Taking into account water, labour, grain and

power costs, he said it was expected the system would cost less than 80 cents per beast, per day to run. This varies according to electrical costs, the seasonal price of grain and any additional labour costs.

At present, the factory is capable of producing 1t of feed a day, an output Mr Dendle said the family would increase to between 5t and 10t if they remained on the property.

While Jamar is currently on the market, the family plan to establish a similar facility on whatever property they next purchased.

Philip Black Auctioneers selling agent Neville Moloney described the Fodder Factory system as less intensive than a feedlot but a better option for supplying and producing supplementary feed.

Mr Dendle said the first 120 cattle allocated the barley sprouts gained up to 1.6kg/day with access to only 6ha to 8ha of buffel pasture during 60 days. The stock is bought in weighing 220-260kg then grown out to 300-360kg for sale into a variety of markets.

"I'm not sure what it would cost to have a paddock to produce a tonne of feed at (similar) quality," Mr Dendle said.

Mr Moloney said the factory was a cheaper alternative than buying land and provided a drought-proofing mechanism.

"If the area went into drought, you could use the factory to supplement the other stock as well," Mr Moloney said.

Jamar comprises mostly red sandy loam soils with buffel and seca stylo pastures along with some blackcurrant bush and has been selectively cleared.



Brad and Jim Dendle can turn 1kg of seed into about 10kg of green fodder for their stock, using the Fodder Factory on Jamar, Yamala, adding an extra finishing component to their breeding operation.