

## Cow Chorus

“Tea for two... and two for tea,” sang Kiwi doctors, David and Christina Clee as they lay in the grass taking a break from work on their 56 hectare pine plantation. Suddenly they were joined by a chorus of “moos” as 40 heifers, kept to reduce fire risk, joined them for a sing song. It was the Clee’s moment of epiphany. They decided to become cattle breeders.



Wanting a small beef breed, they chose Lowlines. Artificial insemination, embryo transplant and ova collection followed. Their admiration of Lowlines increased and so they expanded, buying 30 hectares of good grazing close to their pine plantation.

The Clee’s stud is called Rancho Radiata in honour of the pine trees. Christina, a Kiwi and a radiologist who works full time, now spends her weekends ultrasound scanning Lowlines. David, Welsh/Canadian and a GP, works three months of the year in Canada and the rest on the farm. Growing grass and the cattle to eat it supplies the physical and mental challenges they both love.

Since they bought the 30 hectare block three years ago, they’ve put in fences, water systems, done weed control and applied fertilizer and have increased their

Lowline herd to twelve breeding cows. Lowline bulls are sold to small block farms and larger farms with dairy heifers.

Pure bred Lowlines are small for the New Zealand beef market which has no small beef categories. Producers are penalised financially if a carcass weight is less than 180kg. Because of this, the Clees have been cross breeding Lowlines with Angus and Charolais, with the progeny reaching a viable 450kg at between 20 and 24 months. A good size for the New Zealand domestic market.

When they discovered that second cross Lowline/Jersey could match the weights of first cross Lowline/Charolais at a year, they decided to put their faith in maternal milk supply and have invested in Dutch MRI cattle, named for the Meuse, Rhine, and Issel rivers that run through Holland.

A dual purpose breed which they first noticed on the farm of a Dutch neighbour, MRI cattle grow excellent beef and are good doers without the enormous size of Charolais and some Angus. The Lowline/MRI cross shows excellent hybrid vigour, is naturally polled and tends to be black.

“Our current ambition is to produce high quality beef from a sensibly sized cow,” says Christina. They’ll achieve it, of course.

Visit Rancho Radiata and you’ll be entertained with tea and delicacies in the civilised setting of a traditional Kiwi woolshed with picnic table and chairs. An amiable chook comes for her share of the repast and outside the Lowlines moo softly as they graze on the excellent grass. A bucolic setting and one to envy. Good luck with the Dutch cows.

## An interest in Lowlines carried this former IT teacher into a career in Ag



Matthew Dickinson, an Ag teacher at Ballarat Grammar, is an Australian Lowline breeder who persuaded his school to take the plunge and become a Lowline Stud. Matthew had made his own career change earlier, when his interest in Lowlines led him out of his field as an IT teacher, into a very fulfilling career teaching Ag.

Says Matthew: “Last November, a student with no previous farm or cattle handling experience before studying Ag at school, paraded the school’s Lowline heifer at the Ballarat Show, taking home a blue ribbon. It now hangs in our classroom.”

Matthew’s full story will appear in the next issue of “Join Us in Lowline Country.”