

# Meating the market

THEY CAN DO IT ..... COULD YOU?

## Margo Hayes

Developing a branded Lowline beef product has always been one of Margo's ambitions. Now she's doing it in a synergistic relationship with Brisbane butcher, Andrew Wishart.

Currently Andrew is processing one Lowline carcass a week with the capacity to expand his sales to meet the supply. On taking home beef from a Vitulus Purebred steer that was fattened for display at the Small Breed Field day, Andrew described it as "The best beef I've ever eaten." High praise from a man who owns four butcher shops. His customers' compliments are just as good.

Andrew's Quality Meats at Mt Ommany sells more than 2,500 kg of beef every week. With three other shops doing similar amounts, there's a load of room for expansion. And the synergy is there. Andrew has the outlets, the turnover, and the expertise in marketing beef while Margo can source the supply, help market it, select the genetics and provide the feeding regime required.

The project started when Andrew saw a photo of the carcass that won Margo Grand Champion at 2007 Brisbane Royal. It was an ideal size for his shops, he thought, as he looked at her website. He also saw an opportunity to promote Lowline Beef as something unique that would give him an edge over other butchers.

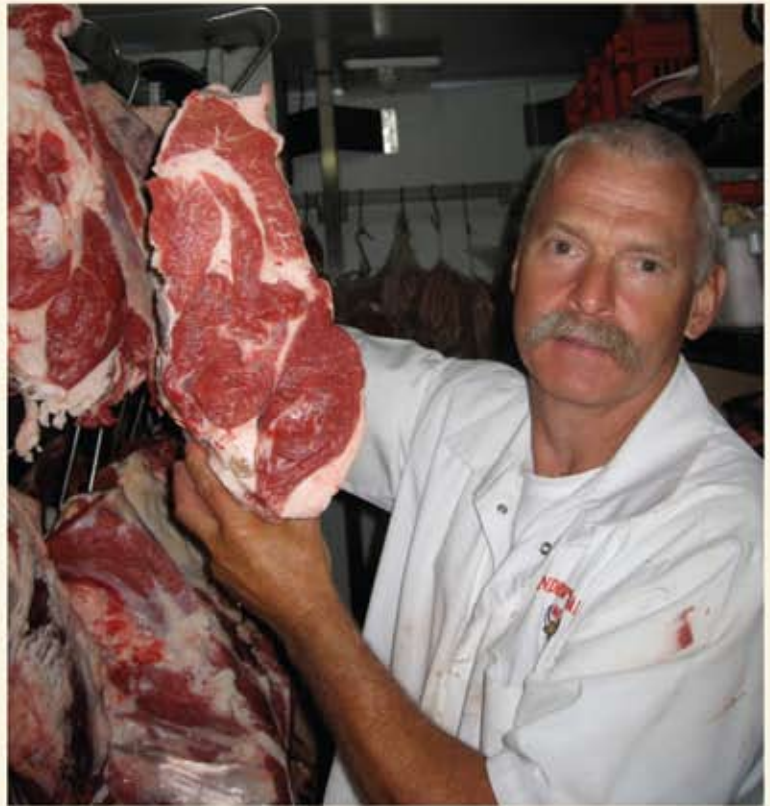
For manageability, Andrew prefers a hot carcass weight no greater than 200kg. Lowlines fit his specification perfectly with the quality and flavors he is seeking and are a huge improvement over small carcasses obtained from the abattoir.

More than 50 Lowline and Lowline x steers have been purchased for the project between August and January, creating a valuable market for small acreage farmers in Queensland. The base payment is \$1.60 plus an extra 10c for cattle that are vaccinated and supplied with health records and another 10c for animals sired by Vitulus bulls.

Steers are bought from weaning up to two years of age and are finished in around 90 days, grain assisted but with access to grass pastures. Each animal is different, of course, but already some genetic lines are outperforming others. And they're still experimenting to find the optimum number of days needed to create correct fat coverage.

Greater throughput is planned with a forward contract to purchase from a large producer at St George who uses Vitulus bulls over a commercial Hereford herd. In February, 18 purebred Lowline steers are arriving from Canberra.

Lessons have been learnt by both parties along the way. The margins that the shops operate on and getting appropriate fat cover ....butchers hate excess fat but the right amount some is required for quality beef. Genetics, the feeding regime and so on. Both Margo and Andrew expect the project to expand making them significant players in the branded beef market.



Brisbane butcher Andrew Wishart sells Lowline Beef as a prestige product in a joint venture with Margo Hayes.

## Lynda Senger-Whitehead... a different approach

"We believe we can win converts to the Australian Lowline breed by consistently delivering stock that meet market specifications and quality of product in a non-*breed* specific market," says Lynda." As seedstock breeders we see our primary market as other beef producers not the end consumers."

Yet Lynda sells every beef animal she can produce and receives premium prices. Her Australian Lowline sires crossed with Poll Hereford matrons produce a 14 - 15 mths old weaner that lays down the optimum coverage of fat despite their young age. They also breed for temperament, as this has a major impact on meat quality, a fact recently proven in controlled studies at the Beef CRC.

The marketing vehicle for Lynda's Lowline cross beef is a consortium of producers she first met at the Lardner Steer Trial in 2002. Their prime grass-fed beef is marketed directly to butchers as Gippsland Natural. The quality is guaranteed by the Meat Standards Australia grading system - if it doesn't grade it doesn't sell as Gippsland Natural and you don't get the premium. Heifers bring the same price as steers. "We used Ag Show steer and heifer competitions to learn as much as we could about rates of gain and fat scores for our Australian Lowline/Poll Hereford cross and from 2003 on we have never delivered a non-grader."

An additional brand, "Enviomeat," was added following participation in a Federally funded project which worked out a practical, documentable, auditable environmental management system for beef farming. The Enviomeat promise is to "minimise waste and pollution of land, water and air, protect native flora and fauna and encourage biodiversity, balance production with land conservation, work towards catchment priorities and strategies and comply with relevant legislation and industry codes of practice.