



Making the most of dairy-beef cross calves



Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries

Over the last two years, a family dairy farm in Marburg has mated some of the herd to Limousin or Angus to take advantage of the high-price cattle market and improve on-farm income. While only a smaller scale dairy operation—milking 140 cows of composite breeds including Friesians, Jerseys and Brown Swiss all year round—Adrian and Lynne Anstis have been able to continue rearing their dairy heifer calves and growing out their beef cross calves with little impact on their day-to-day feeding practices.

Initially the beef cross calves remain on-calf with cows (those with higher than desirable somatic cell count) for a three-month period where they have access to *ad lib* grain and hay until weaning. Once the bulls are castrated, the heifers and steers are weaned and transitioned slowly from grain and hay to the lactating cow total mixed ration (TMR), that contains a mixture of white sorghum silage or barley silage, brewers grain, barley grain and soybean meal. While not perfectly balanced for growing out dairy-beef cross animals, the ability to use the TMR system and feed them at the same time as feeding the milkers meant there was little disruption to Adrian's normal feeding routine.

"We have always had some dairy cross beef calves in the system but have often sold the calves quite young, or at 10 weeks of age when the market prices are high," Adrian said.

"This is something we wanted to trial and at the moment it's paid off—with a boost to our income, which makes the extra work worth it."

Currently, the Anstis have set up two penned areas around an existing shade structure, using some steel panels and a couple of water troughs. Some old concrete troughs have been used to hold the TMR, resulting in very little wastage.

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grow and have been very surprised how they seem to fill out despite the low grain intake," Adrian said.

In the last 12 months, Adrian and Lynne have reared 24 beef cross dairy calves and grown them out up to 10 months of age, depending on their size. During this time, they have averaged \$1,383 per animal, with another seven to be sold in February 2022. Prices have risen since the first batch of dairy crosses were sent to market, with the last batch sent in late November averaging \$1,605/head. ■■

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