



## **SIZE ISN'T EVERYTHING**

When it comes to selecting heifers many of us look at those big heifers and comment on what a 'good' heifer she is. Likewise with heifers in the sale ring, we tend to go for the 'good big' heifer. Often these heifers are up to 36 months old and only just in calf but they are big and beautiful cows. Well you may be making a very expensive mistake as you must accept the cow size that your country will carry economically and productively.

I learnt this fact the hard way preg testing with our vet who had been working in the Brisbane Valley for 30 odd years, I was bewailing the fact that my best (looking) cows were being bang tailed and drafted into the empty yard. We were also drafting out the cast for age 10 year old cows that would calve at 11 and then be fattened for slaughter.

By the end of preg testing I had just about all the 10 year old cows in one yard, all pregnant and in the empties there were some very good types of younger cows.

My wise old vet then asked me what the similarities in the two yards were. My old pregnant cows were all like peas in a pod with smaller frames and had had 8 calves - nothing gets a second chance here. All the empty cows were at least a frame score taller than the old cows and were in lighter condition than the old cows. We had just weaned a calf off every cow in the yards and all had been run under identical conditions.

Your country can't support those big cows and get a calf every year out of them he said and as a result of that we have stopped selecting so much for size. At selection time we now join the smaller framed earlier maturing heifers so long as their conformation is what we want and this year we averaged 92% in calf over the whole herd of 500 breeders.

We still buy big framed muscular bulls and our bullock weights have not slipped at all and we are finding that many can be turned off a year earlier as milk or 2 tooth and they fit that market very well and attract a price premium.

The mature cow weights have not suffered much either although we find we are selling earlier in the season as they fatten faster than the big framed cows and we don't want to incur over fat penalties at the abattoir.

That is a bonus for the country as we are not stocked to capacity going into winter and by selling the cows and steers earlier in the season the fattening paddocks get a spell while grass is still growing.

If you have improved pastures this may not apply to you but for those of us who run our breeders on lighter native pasture country have a good hard look at your empties next preg test and see if this scenario applies to your herd. You may well be culling your best breeders at heifer selection time by not selecting those early maturing smaller framed heifers and calves on the ground is what makes you money.

Further information

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