The herdbook registrations of beef cattle in 2005 reached their highest level in a decade. In releasing the figures this week, the Executive Director of the Australian Registered Cattle Breeders Association (ARCBA), Dr Arthur Rickards said that the result was a triumphant endorsement of the diligence of Australia’s stud breeders in providing the right genetics to achieve productivity improvement throughout Australia’s beef herd.

Herdbook registrations across all beef breeds in 2005 reached 141,432, a 9.9% increase over the level of 2004. This was the highest aggregate of registrations since 1996 when the discovery of BSE in the UK depressed the demand for beef globally.

The aggregate of herdbook registrations plus secondary register cattle (i.e. those produced for breeding but outside the herdbook) exceed 200,000 for the first time since 1996. This has been a sweet victory for the beef industry’s 9,500 registered beef cattle breeders, many of whom have battled against the effects of the worst drought in the last one hundred years.

The price of Australian beef has been buoyant in the last two years in part due to the restrictions on exports of beef from both Canada and USA. This has in turn given commercial cattlemen the confidence and the cash resources to upgrade their genetics.

Importantly, the increase in registrations was across the board with british breeds up to 8%, tropical breeds up 12% and European breeds up by 8.9%.

In the period 2002-2004, ARCBA conducted a detailed strategic planning exercise for its members. This identified a number of ways in which ARCBA members could achieve growth. It is pleasing to see some of these strategies starting to produce results.

Two of the strategies identified by ARCBA are attracting a lot of attention in 2006. The first of these is the roll out of a national technical support program for the BREEDPLAN genetic evaluation service. This will involve 64 workshops in regional areas of Australia to explain the proper use of BREEDPLAN. The first two of these workshops have now been held and they attracted participation rates well beyond expectations.

The workshops will be augmented by on-farm visits to provide technical support and consultation to the Technical Committees of participating breed societies.

The second strategy is to establish Australia as seedstock farm for the global cattle industry. ARCBA has been closely involved in the consultation process that saw a quality assurance system put in place for the export of dairy heifers to China. Compliance certificates are now issued to China through the Holstein-Friesian Association of Australia. This trade is likely to rebuild to an export of around 20,000
heifers per year. The Chinese specification is for heifers with pedigrees available thus endorsing ARCBA’s strategic thinking about quality assured exports.

In the beef industry, ARCBA is playing a prominent role in the conduct of two seminars on the export of beef genetics at Beef 2006. One seminar is for Australian exporters and the other for potential importers of Australian genetics. A genetics precinct will be established at the Beef Expo for the first time. ARCBA has recommended that the International Livestock Resources and Information Centre (ILRIC) be appointed to establish a national secretariat for the export of cattle genetics and work towards this is proceeding rapidly.

Genetic exports have yet to influence beef cattle registrations. However, as export volumes increase, this influence on registrations will become pronounced – creating a “second wind” for the expansion of Australia’s registered cattle industry.

“2005 was a very good year for the registered cattle industry” concluded Dr Rickards.

Authorised by:
Dr. P.A. Rickards OAM
Executive Director
Australian Registered Cattle Breeders Association
Phone: 02 67 73 3555
Fax: 02 67 72 5376
Email: office@abri.une.edu.au