

Keeping the market in mind

BY HEATHER FRAZIER, SPECKLE PARK INTERNATIONAL

FOUR producers put Speckle Park genetics to the test, and their experiences show where hybrid vigour can add value and why the market still needs to be part of the breeding decision.

Chalambra's self-replacing herd in Victoria, Dairy Adventures' beef-on-dairy program in South Australia, Belgrae's grass-fed cattle and Arley Farm's premium supply chain in Western Australia put Speckle Park genetics to four very different jobs.

Four operations, four starting points and one recurring theme: the cross works best when the job is clear.

At Chalambra, south of Hamilton, the genetics had a clear job: Simon and Alex Menzel wanted a moderate, deep-bodied cow that could keep working when conditions tightened. The past two seasons are the driest recorded on their 800-hectare property, where numbers move with the season, not bought feed.

"Matching stocking rate



Kylie, Simon and Alex Menzel at Chalambra, Victoria, where Speckle Park genetics are being built into a flexible, self-replacing commercial herd. Picture supplied

to carrying capacity is the number one rule," Alex Menzel said.

Run under the same conditions and feed budget, the Speckle Park cows required about 20 per cent less feed,

held condition better and recorded 95pc conception through the dry, against roughly 90pc in the Angus-based females, according to Mr Menzel.

When the season broke,

they moved from condition score two to three-and-a-half in three to four weeks.

The Zanker family of Dairy Adventures had a different problem: improving fertility left more dairy heifers than it needed. Narelle Zanker says the Speckle Park-cross calves displayed more yield and thickness than earlier Angus and Murray Grey crosses, with strong growth and docile temperament.

The business is now taking greater numbers through to finishing above 600 kilograms and targeting an MSA grid with Thomas Foods International.

Different systems, same starting point: the genetics were brought in to solve a production problem.

Chalambra's first Speckle Park joining nearly ended the program, but the issue was the suitability of the individual bulls, rather than a failure of the Speckle Park-Angus cross. The following year the Menzels started again with the help of a seedstock breeder who knew both sides of the Speckle Park/Angus-cross.

Calving ease, mature size,

structure, fertility and the target market all still count, and Chalambra culls hard on feet, temperament and structure.

Simon Menzel values longevity: a cow calving 12 to 15 years beats a heavier female replaced sooner, he says.

Not all Speckles carry the familiar markings, but Alex Menzel says the difference shows in thickness, condition and performance. Earlier this year he put them into the toughest paddocks, without the pick of the feed.

"They just put their heads down and powered through it," he said.

Livestock consultant and stock agent Andrew Hosken has seen the breed used over Angus, Hereford, Shorthorn, Santa Gertrudis and Bos indicus females.

"It doesn't matter what breed you put them over, they do a good job," Mr Hosken said.

He believes in knowing the market, and says in suitable feedlot programs he buys 350 to 420kg mixed-sex Speckle Park-cross cattle without a breed discount.

Graeme and Amanda Kro-

ehn, Belgrae, join Angus, Red Angus and Speckle Park-infused females to Speckle Park bulls, targeting 440kg at 12 to 14 months off grass. Meat and Livestock Australia benchmarked their Greenham kill data for Woolworths at an average MSA Index of 60.90.

"We were looking for cattle that could efficiently convert grass into kilograms and deliver a quality carcase," Mr Kroehn said.

At Ben and Victoria Murphy's Arley Farm, 119 Speckle Park-infused cattle processed in 2026 averaged an MSA Index of 62.46, with 86pc above the national top-quarter threshold of 61.18.

Chalambra sells through AuctionsPlus while building numbers towards direct feedlot relationships. Simon Menzel believes the breed has the efficiency, yield and eating quality to earn recognition, but larger, more consistent lines are needed.

"The efficiency gains show up in the paddock straight away," he said. Market recognition, he believes, is still catching up.

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