

Beef brands on the rise

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Australian beef companies are increasingly turning to brands to differentiate their product.

By Nathan Dyer

On a cloudy afternoon on Queensland's Darling Downs, Mort & Co marketing manager Tim Burgess is sharing lunch with colleagues at the company's massive Grassdale feedlot, 40 km south of Dalby. Tucking into a 750-gram 'cattleman's cutlet' from Mort & Co's own 70-day grainfed Darling Point brand, Tim explains the growing prominence of branded beef products. "The whole world is looking to get closer to the end user, and the end users are looking to get closer to the source," says Tim. "Whether it's Shanghai or New York or London, right across South-East Asia and Australia, people want to know where their beef comes from."

STAYING ON TREND

Tim says brands give producers the ability to tell their story and connect with consumers. Launched in 2015, Mort & Co's Phoenix Beef suite of brands includes everything from a free-range grain finished product to a 400-day grainfed Wagyu offering. With more and more beef brands in the market, Tim says producers need to be increasingly savvy about how they present their products.

"For a brand to retain longevity you really have to be smart

Certified Australian Angus Beef's **SUCCESS** depends on consistency.



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about how you position that brand, and make sure you've got a really consistent supply chain behind you," says Tim. Keeping a close eye on market trends, including eating and packaging preferences, is also crucial. "People are always looking for something new and different and you've got to be on trend," says Tim.



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Beijing-based international business general manager for Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA), Michael Finucan, says branding success requires very clear strategy. "Whether it's a grassfed program or a grainfed program looking at a higher marbled product, to be successful you have to understand your customer and have a proposition that matches them," says Michael. "With any branding you need to understand what your positioning is, how you're differentiating yourself from competitors, and what segment you're targeting."

CONSISTENCY IS KEY

Conceived two decades ago by Australian producers wanting to replicate a similar campaign in America, Certified Australian Angus Beef (CAAB) is one of the country's great beef branding success stories. Certified Angus Group chief executive Kate Brabin says the key to that success has been consistency, referring to the brand's stringent producer and processor guidelines enforced by a program of licensing and regular audits.

Innovative marketing is also crucial. Angus beef's appearance on the burger menu at McDonald's is a case-in-point. "What McDonald's did is they made Angus their premium offer," says Kate. "So it's not just any regular burger, it's their black tie offer. It's more expensive, it's better quality and it's a bigger patty that eats better," she says. "Now there's not a person in Australia that hasn't heard the words 'Angus beef'."

Victorian producer and Angus Australia vice-president, Brad Gilmour, who runs 1,000 Angus cattle on his family's 1,200-hectare Terang property in the state's Western District,

- 1 A diner's-eye view of a Cape Grim steak at Port Melbourne's Railway Club Hotel.
- 2 Oakey Beef Exports general manager Pat Gleeson on the floor at the Darling Downs abattoir, Queensland.
- 3 Mort & Co marketing manager Tim Burgess at the company's Grassdale feedlot, Queensland.

says the retail success of the Angus brand flows back to producers. The Gilmours supply the CAAB and Angus Pure brands, as well as other high-end brands like Rangers Valley and Hopkins River Beef. "Angus has got a BMW or a Mercedes badge on the front of it," says Brad. "That's how people perceive it, and it's not just a perception; we're able to consistently back that up."

PARTNERING WITH THE RIGHT PEOPLE

For the Greenham family, owners of renowned Tasmanian brands Robbins Island Wagyu and Cape Grim Beef, establishing key industry partners has been crucial to brand growth. Produced at Greenham's Smithton plant in north-western Tasmania, the Cape Grim brand is sold to top Australian restaurants and independent butchers, and exported to more than 15 countries.

Greenham Tasmania managing director Peter Greenham Jnr. says partnering with renowned Australian chef Neil Perry was instrumental in the brand's early success.

"Neil really promoted it as the old-style beef, not the young yearling type of beef that's produced now through feedlots," explains Peter.

"These cattle were aged between 30 and 36 months, and



they were much deeper in flavour, had much more marbling and much bigger cut size; it was something different in the market.”

In addition to linking their product with Tasmania’s clean and green reputation, and industry-leading protocols like Meat Standards Australia, Greenham has chosen not to sell into the big supermarkets. “Whoever we want to partner with they really have to be engaged with the brand,” explains marketing manager, Trevor Fleming. “Because we view handling Cape Grim as an opportunity, not just to be bandied around and lumped in with other beef products.”

Port Melbourne’s historic Railway Club Hotel is a case-in-point. The hotel serves only Cape Grim and Robbins Island Wagyu beef. “It means we’ve got a consistent product, people know what they’re getting, they know it’s all grassfed, and people recognise the brands,” says chef Luke Van Den Engel.

STANDING OUT FROM THE CROWD

Back on the Darling Downs, general manager of Japanese-owned processor Oakey Beef Exports, Pat Gleeson, says beef brands are the way of the future.

Located 70 km east of Grassdale, the Oakey facility slaughtered 270,000 head last year, employs 800 locals, and produces a range of export-destined brands, including the 1788 Platinum Brand which took out a gold medal at the 2015 World Steak Challenge.

Pat says the growth of beef brands reflects the move by many processors from commodity producers to food suppliers. “We’re starting to get away from that commodity item, as

4 Cape Grim branded product on retail shelves.
5 Head chef Luke Van Den Engel with a Robbins Island Wagyu steak at Port Melbourne’s Railway Club Hotel.

» We view handling Cape Grim as an opportunity, not just to be bandied around and lumped in with other beef products. «

Trevor Fleming



such, and move towards things like portion-controlled, shelf-ready products, smaller packaging, a couple of steaks,” says Pat.

MLA’s Michael Finucan says with the growing number of beef brands on the market, standing out from the crowd is more important than ever. “There are so many variations of what’s on offer these days and you need to build your brand to tell that story.” And although getting a premium is one of the top indicators of brand success, Michael says building a loyal customer base is another big benefit. “There’s obviously the price premium, but regular repeat sales to loyal customers is probably just as important,” says Michael. ■

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