

How to Drug Proof your Children

(or that's the idea anyway) by Christine Wade

In October 1999, we packed our three children up, and headed west for a three week camping holiday. We wanted to visit the zoo, explore the wine growing regions of NSW and Rutherglen, and visit Peter's ancestral family farm at Euroley NSW as well as introduce the children to some of their long lost relatives. Our travels took us out to Mudgee and Dubbo, down through Parkes and Forbes, along the Lachlan and Murray Rivers, into the Riverina and back out again through the high country of the Snowy Mountains on both sides of the border, before heading for home via the Southern Highlands.

It was a great trip, remarkable for the fact that the children (who were then 3, 7 and 10) managed three weeks without TV, but it was also an unsettling journey. Peter and I found ourselves assessing each region for its potential to satisfy our deep need for a farm of our own. Forbes was nice with a great selection of red wine at the local IGA, Mudgee was gorgeous, Griffith vibrant and alive, Jindabyne had great potential for extra curricula activities. We got home and found ourselves reliving each step of the journey until we worked out that we needed to make our 'seachange'—**now**, not when the kids were older, and that it needed to be a "country change". We were living in the seaside village of Norah Head in an apartment above the general practice we owned and ran. Apart from anything Joseph had kicked one too many clocks off the wall with his football.

We had two choices: to make a complete break, sell the practice and move somewhere completely different; or stay in the same practice and find land within a commutable distance. The decision was made for us, as the state of general practice meant that it was impossible to sell the business and so began

our search for land and a farming venture within a 40-minute drive of Norah Head.

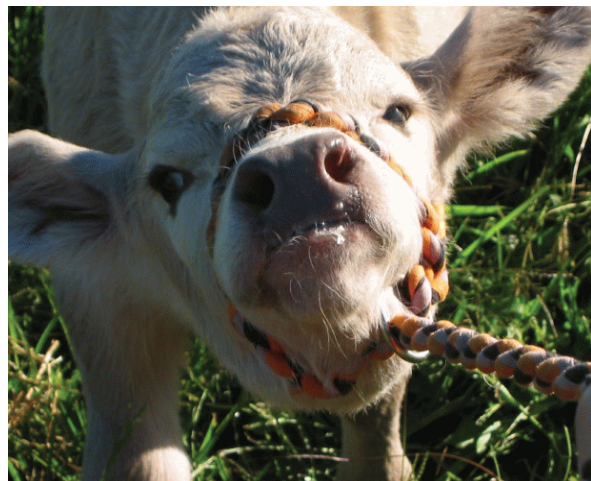
Peter enrolled in courses at Tocal Agricultural College, and our nighttime reading consisted of manuals on planning and planting, irrigation and fertigation, fencing and pasture, weeds and fertilisers, alpacas, goats, cattle, (not ostriches), olives, macadamias - anything and everything we could lay our hands on to

ensure that our venture was given the best possible chance to succeed.

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During our research phase Glenfiddich Stud at Kulnura held an auction of

stock. We went along on a fact-finding mission, took one look and registered ourselves as bidders. Despite our best intentions of only going along to assess the situation, we came home the proud owners of 2 Square Meater cows with calves at foot. You would have to say that with the benefit of hindsight, it was a very successful impulse buy, as from that first package we have raised a cow who went on to be Grand Champion cow at Maitland Show and Reserve Senior Champion cow at the Royal Easter show in 2003, sold 2 cows with calves at foot, and a steer. All were the original animals or their progeny from that first package. • •





Even though our first purchase was unplanned, our attendance at the auction was planned. Getting involved after spending time researching the breed seems to be a characteristic of Square Meaters breeders. People entering the market tend to be the discerning buyer who has been looking around for the animal that suits their particular circumstances. The other buyer is the breeder of other breeds who is having difficulties, and sees in the Square Meaters a potential solution to their problems.

We were attracted to the Square Meaters initially because we had some absolute criteria that had to be met. The cattle had to be polled (no way did I want to be having to deal with horns). They had to be genuine easy calvers. After some nasty experiences in my youth with a chain and towbar one thing I did not want to be doing was pulling calves. Now into our third breeding season, it is with great relief that we can say our experience to date supports the claims of the Society that Square Meater cows have few birthing difficulties. What I have learnt is that it is the breeding characteristics of both the cows and the bulls that combine to produce the easy calving ability.

The next characteristic is one that I have learnt to appreciate with the passage of time, and that is the calm (and dare I say endearing) temperament of these cattle. Peter and I both

had experience in our growing years with cattle, and this is what we wanted to share with our children. As our move to the country was a lifestyle choice the last thing I wanted was to be in a situation where we were placing ourselves or the kids at risk. We have had some fun with some rodeo style tie ups when breaking the cattle in to lead, but so far we feel that we certainly made the right choice. Our cows are sensible, and the bull is a pushover.

This has been of particular importance when we have had visitors from "the city". We didn't realise how important it would be to have quiet cattle, until you have people who visit and are busting to "do something". Although we are careful to never put ourselves or anyone else in a position of danger, it is great to be able to let our friends have a go. The cattle have really proven themselves in this regard, and their sensible attitude has been appreciated by all our friends who have washed, groomed, walked and even milked our cows! The only drawback of their temperament is how attached we become to them which is an issue when it comes to eating or selling them.

Eating them is, of course, the next most important criteria. It was the eatability that drew us to cattle, and away from alpaca. At the end of the day, if your breeding programme falls over, ••

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if you don't enjoy the show circuit or if you have 100% males in a drop, you can always eat any animals that are surplus to your breeding programme. Initially I thought eating our own animals would be a hurdle, Peter held no such qualms.

As much as I hate to admit it he was right. Once you have eaten your own home grown produce, your standards rise. We are now

"meatist". It is difficult to enjoy poor quality meat anytime, but once you know what grass fed steers taste like, nothing else compares. Our friends and family all serve fish and chicken when we visit. One of the most common questions asked by potential Square Meater breeders is about the markets for the end product. The market is currently hugely under explored, and I think the major problem facing most breeders is actually producing enough to meet the demand. Everyone is always asking about heifers, and we have pre-sold every steer we have raised.

*Senior Bull Championship
remains however the Holy Grail..*

After this experience, we have decided to re-analyse our focus, and get back to basics. What we are good at is cows and calves, good quality cows with proven fertility, easy calving and with good mothering abilities. We

have a good strong base of matriarchs, who have taught the herd about laneways, gates and yards. They come when called. We want to be

proud of the animals we sell, and we want to know that the people we sell them to will have animals they can work with safely.

The Senior Bull Championship remains however the Holy Grail, the golden event - guts and glory, just like the men's 100m at the Olympics. Who knows perhaps the next little bull calf born on Silver Gully Estate will give the prestigious southern breeders a run for their money in the years to come? I'm not giving up, just focussing!!

We are currently in the process of preparing our show team for next year. Tying up, leading, washing and grooming, this is how we hope to drug proof our kids. They have contributed financially to the herd, and now the proud owners of their own little heifer, Silver Gully Lucinda (so named because she was a female - lucky, the next male is Yorrich, as in "alas poor Yorrich"). The kids are an invaluable help, and certainly in a short amount of time have gained a wealth of knowledge and practical skills. Having Square Meaters allows me to have the farm and animals I always longed for, but there is a financial reward, you do actually sell something, and the show circuit adds the sporting element. It is a competition, not a hobby. You can be as serious or as frivolous as you like, as long as you are having fun!

Our family extends a warm welcome to any new breeders, we are confident you will get as much enjoyment from your animals as we do, and extend an invitation for anyone interested to come and have a look at our enterprise. • •



Figure 3. Milly Wade with Silver Gully Garnet.

It is in exploring the markets that we feel we have finally decided upon our marketing strategy, and our business plan focus. We did well at Maitland and Royal Canberra Show with our bull Silver Gully Xavier. He placed in his class at Royal Sydney, and was highest ranked in the weigh and scan sheet. We were unable to use him because he was related to most of our herd. One bull sitting unused in a paddock and awaiting a buyer isn't maximal utilisation of our precious paddock space.



It is the camaraderie of the society that has been such a welcome surprise. We have been overwhelmed with the support we have received from the senior and experienced members of the society. From advice on

breeding and feeding, to helping at the shows when things get a bit out of control, to being the supportive sympathetic listener on the phone when things go wrong. The kids might have learnt a lot but what we have learned has been phenomenal, and so much of it has been handed over so generously by other breeders. The regional group format has put into place formal ties that can be loosened to grow into friendships. It is this support that has developed my feeling that it is a sport, even though we are competing, the joy of the game lies in the sportsmanship, and the Square Meaters society shows great team spirit. Well done guys. • •



Figure 5. Christine, Hannah & Joseph Wade with Silver Gully Xavier at Sydney Royal 2003.

Vale

Since this article was written, Peter Wade has tragically passed away. Peter was a keen supporter of the Square Meaters Cattle Association and a friend of many members.

The SMCA extend their sincere condolences to Christine, Hannah, Joseph and Milly.

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