



Buffalo News

VOL 6 NO 2 - AUGUST 2006

Official newsletter of the Australian Buffalo Industry Council

North Queensland buff dairy sector takes a big step forward

An exciting partnership has been formed between Queensland's only buffalo milk producer, Mitch Humphries, the new Vannella Cheese Factory in Cairns and award-winning cheese maker Vito Minoia.

At the recent Brisbane International Cheese awards, Vito Minoia, now producer of the country's finest Buffalo Mozzarella, took out the only Gold Medal in his class.

In doing so, he beat a well recognised Australian variety, as well as

top of the range imported Italian cheeses.

Vito may have had some inside knowledge, however, because he learnt the art of making buffalo cheese (Mozzarella di Buffala) as a boy of 16, in a small factory south of Naples in Italy

Thirty years later, and now with a wealth of experience in cheese making behind, Vito and his family have finally realised their dream in establishing the new Vannella Cheese Factory in Cairns.

"We are delighted to have been able to build our factory in such a wonderful part of Australia" Vito says.

"The fact that there is a local farmer producing the buffalo milk presents a special opportunity to use this unique fresh local product."

He added that this meant his customers could experience a delectable milky cheese which was so much fresher than imported counterparts which are many days old by the time they arrived in Australia.

The buffalo milk Vito is referring to is produced by Mitch Humphries at Millaa Millaa on the Atherton Tablelands a short distance from Cairns.

Mitch has enjoyed success as a cheese maker in his own right through his north Queensland buffalo dairy business, which was established three years ago at the wonder of local dairy farmers.

"You need a lot of perseverance and a lot of heart when you take on these big mutts" Mitch laughs.

Referring to his new joint venture Mitch says: "We joined up with Vito once we knew of his credentials and that he was building his factory in Cairns. I believe he is going to be one of the biggest things to hit the Australian speciality cheese industry in the coming years. This was the first time he entered his own brand of cheese in such a prestige competition, and he is already blitzing the best imported cheeses."

Buff show promotion



The NT Buffalo Industry Council (NTBIC) staged another highly popular TenderBuff food stall at this year's Royal Darwin Show in late July. Neil Ross and his tip-of-the-fingers knowledge were missed after six years but he was happy to pass it on to others, like Ernie Schlupe (pictured) who was on hand to keep the production line running just as smoothly as it has in the past.

ABIC Website - www.buffaloaustralia.org

Making mozzarella at Shaw River

The NT's Barry Lemcke took the opportunity, while in Victoria recently, to observe buffalo milk being turned into mozzarella at Roger Haldane's Shaw River Cheese Factory. He describes the process here.

“Batches of the cheese are made at Shaw River every second day, using two days supply of milk from the dairy's buffalo.

Preparation of the batches begins at 2.30am when starter cultures are added to the milk.

The factory ladies arrive at about 8.00am to begin their job of cutting up the curd into pieces about the size of a brick.

This is then fed through a mincer before going into a barrel where a hot solution is added, causing the minced curd to melt, string together and congeal into a big sticky mass.

The liquid is then drained off and a team of four ladies begin the next important part of the cheese-making process.

This involves the ladies grabbing and stretching football sized chunks, biting off tennis ball sized chunks from the larger piece, and forming ‘bubbles’ by



TOP TO BOTTOM: Roger with one of his buffalo milk tanks. The cheese factory ladies at work. The attractive Shaw River Dairy premises.

squeezing the pieces out through their hands.

These bubbles are then crimped off with the fingers and dropped into a brine solution.

From here, they re packed in 1.5 kg tubs or single plastic jars with the brine, then refrigerated ready to go.

The result is the high quality mozzarella product for which the Shaw River Cheese Factory is becoming renowned.”



Buffalo News

We welcome contributions on any issue or activity relating to Australia's buffalo industry. Stories and/or photos can be sent to, or discussed with:

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Buffalo News is funded by



Success from latest AI work

Buffalo researcher Barry Lemcke provides an update on the RIRDC AI project

Twenty head of mostly Italian heifers at Roger Haldane's Shaw River dairy buffalo operation in Victoria were artificially inseminated in March as part of the ongoing RIRDC research project.

The heifers were scanned by ultrasound machine after 11 weeks gestation, by local operator Ian Grayson, from "Smartsan" (Animal Pregnancy Testing Service).

The successful results, with 10 found to be pregnant, reflected the speed and expertise of local AI technician Mike Vanderaa, and the synchronisation of the 20 heifers used in the trail.

Spurred on by this success, we have since carried out two further AI rounds at Beatrice Hill Farm in the Top End, using the expert services of Alf Turner from NT Artificial Breeders. We persisted with the heifers as well as some lactating cows which were two months post calving. Six cows were also tried with Cue-Mate intra-vaginal devices but two of these dropped out before the allotted time had elapsed.

Neil Ross leaves NTBIC after six years

Neil Ross resigned as NT Buffalo Industry Council (NTBIC) Executive Officer at the end of June, after six years of energetic commitment to the job.

NTBIC President Michael Swart said Neil had done a fantastic job for the local industry against 'humongous odds'.

"I really appreciate the six years of expertise and special effort that Neil has put into our Northern Territory industry," he said. "We will miss his services dearly. I wish him the very best in his new pursuits in the future."

The first round was on the Easter weekend and the second on the 8-9 July. The cows were still in good condition due to the very heavy late rain this year which has helped the green feed to persist long into the dry season.

We ultrasounded all of them on 26 May and only detected five pregnant, (four cows and one heifer), with another two unsure, out of a total of 25 head (15 heifers).

We tried again four weeks later using Alf Turner's expertise and located a total of nine pregnant (five cows and four heifers). The cow rate is good at 50% but the heifer rate at 27% is well below the Victorian result.

The second round in July used 25 head again (15 cows, 10 heifers) and we wait with baited breath for the ultrasound results in late August.

The different treatments we tried on these last two rounds was the 2nd insemination was carried out 24 hours later compared with 12 hours or no second insemination previously. Despite Alf's expertise there was still some difficulty with heifers in not being able to navigate the pipette all the



*Above: AI specialist Alf Turner at work.
Below: The Victorian trial buffalo*

way through the cervix. Cows are not usually difficult in this regard provided they are properly on heat.



Landmark buffalo shipments

AustAsia has recently taken its second shipment of buffalo into Indonesia through the Port of Darwin, and Elders has just shipped its first load out.

Both companies are vertically integrated into the feedlot system in Indonesia and the industry is hoping that market will kick off this dry season.

On the Malaysian front, Sabah has indicated that it will be ordering buffalo shortly but Sarawak has gone quiet.

West Malaysia is looking at taking significant numbers but they still want to pay at the bottom end of the scale.

Buffalo News & Views ... from around the country

VICTORIA

The Victorian Buffalo Industry Council held its AGM on Sunday 18th June 2006 at Heathcote and there was a good roll-up of members. The main emphasis of discussions during the meeting was on developing the buffalo industry in Victoria. It is likely a business plan will be developed shortly with breeders having the opportunity to expand as the industry grows with new entrants being encouraged.

Breeders of buffalo in other southern states will be invited to join to enable access to various government schemes and funds. *Those interested should keep on eye out for further details in the next newsletter.*

ABIC Secretary Athel Smith and VicBic members have been fielding recent queries from all corners of the globe, about Australian buffalo and products. Athel reports on recent contact from Sao Paulo in Brazil regarding information on production and commercialisation of water buffalo meat in Australia, prices paid by the kilo and the possibility of

importing semen into Brazil. Robyn Richmond of VicBIC, has also received correspondence from Bradner British Columbia, Canada inquiring about the purchase of riverine embryos or live imports. She has passed the details on to producers who might be able to respond. The operators can be contacted through bradnerfarm@shaw.ca

QUEENSLAND

Successful North Queensland dairy buffalo farmer Mitch Humphries has been buoyed further by the opening of a new Cairns cheese factory which is using his buffalo milk to produce premium mozzarella cheese. *See full story on Page One.* Buffalo farming activities continue on a steady keel in Queensland with two dairies now operating and stock numbers increasing. The state's buffalo products are being distributed to Brisbane and interstate, and work is underway to further develop meat products for sale in local areas.

TASMANIA

Tasmanian producer and ABIC President Phillip Oates has been working on the National TFAP program as well as some other federal issues of interest to the buffalo industry.

NORTHERN TERRITORY

A total of 804 buffalo were shipped from Darwin in July - 735 to West Malaysia and 69 to Indonesia. That brings this year's total live exports from Darwin to 3512, nearly double the total exports for 2005 (1906).

NTBIC President Michael Swart fears Neil Ross' departure as executive officer has left a void that will adversely affect the local industry. "NT producers are destocking buffalo and, already, exporters are buying stock at ridiculously low prices," he says. "This will not be good for the viability of the industry, but producers have no other outlets."

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NORTHERN TERRITORY

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Helped by his Swiss mates and a few NTBIC members, local committee man Ernie Schlupe gets among the buff burgers, and steak and sausage sandwiches at the recent Royal Darwin Show. He also provided the five TenderBuff animals required for that three-day event, through Litchfield Abattoir and Quality Meats.