

Minnamurra's bold branded bid

Five years ago the Speckle Park breed was virtually unheard of in Australia. Now one of the State's biggest commercial beef producers is laying the foundations to supply 10,000 bodies a year towards a branded Speckle beef product, reports CARLA WIESE-SMITH.



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ONE of the State's largest commercial beef producers, Minnamurra Pastoral Company, has taken the plunge into branded Speckle Park beef production.

Minnamurra, known for its commitment to black cattle, joined 10,000 head last year over its 43,000-hectare operation in NSW and south east Queensland.

It's now joining forces with Six Star Speckle Parks – which introduced the relatively new Canadian breed to Australia in 2007 – to form the Supreme Cattle Company.

The Supreme Cattle Company will market a target quota of branded Speckle Park Supreme beef.

Minnamurra principal David Reid said the move to Speckle Parks to supply branded beef product was merely an evolution.

"It means we can now get a share of the profit beyond the farm gate, which is where it has stopped for us in the past," Mr Reid said.

"This is two independent companies coming together to give sufficient volume to market this product to butchers and restaurants; an embryo to plate service."

Mr Reid said Minnamurra plans to join 1950 head of its 10,000 cow herd to Speckle Park bulls in 2012 using artificial insemination, as well as implanting 160 embryos.

Minnamurra was established in 1973 with the purchase of "Cortina" at Wollar near Mudgee and in the following 25 years grew to 8600 hectares at Wollar and 3000ha at Dunedoo.

In 2007, the Reid family decided to diversify their landholdings with 9500ha purchased at Walgett and 5200ha at Gunnedah, the latter subsequently growing to 11,400ha.

Last year a further 12,000ha was purchased at Dirranbandi, Queensland, to act as a base for managing the company's northern herd, which is agisted on about 100,000ha of grazing country in the surrounding area.

"The expansion over the past five years has been driven by the need to hedge against climate variability, to



A promising Speckle in his eye, half a world away

HIGH meat yield, growth and "great table appeal" are terms of profit in the beef business and traits which caught the eye of Minnamurra general manager Dennis Power on a trip to Calgary Stampede in Canada.

It was 2011, and the Speckle Park breed had won the event's steer competition – and taken seven of the top 10 placings.

"What most impressed me was the dressing percentage; the winner dressed at 72 per cent (carcase weight)," Mr Power said.

He knew there were a few

Speckles "kicking around" in Australia, so on a trip to a bull sale with Minnamurra stock consultant Tony Dowe, Sydney, he mentioned the breed.

"I said when a new program starts, the first ones in it are the ones to go to if you want to get involved," Mr Dowe said.

He explained that if the calves were good they could cash in on the Speckle Park Supreme program, and if they weren't, then they would still return as much as their other cattle.

It was with this in mind – and the opportunity to have control

over the destiny of its product through branding with a newly-formed joint venture with Six Star Speckle Parks, called Speckle Park Supreme – that Minnamurra took the step of investment.

"As an operation, Minnamurra needs to move upstream as far as marketing," Mr Power said.

"The marketing side is set up with Speckle Park Supreme, it just needs the volume.

"We can offer that capability with our operation."

He also said if Speckle Parks were to work, this would give

the breed the best opportunity to get off the ground.

"It's not something we just jumped in to; we needed to confirm the fertility and maternal traits, the availability of seedstock and ease of calving and handling before moving into the breed," he said.

"We will be able to make sure whatever hits the plate is up to standard," he said.

Pictured with Minnamurra Angus females running with Speckle Park bulls is Minnamurra stock manager Murray Lillecrapp.

move breeding cows onto lower cost country and to expand the herd to achieve economies of scale," Mr Reid said.

"The basic principles of the business are still to produce consistently high quality meat at a profit."

The newly formed company hopes to process 14,000 bodies by 2016, with a predicted 10,000 bodies from Minnamurra.

Mr Reid said the opportunity to value-add was the drive behind Minnamurra's venture into a branded beef product.

"It offers consumers the ability to select their beef with confidence," he said.

Meat standards will be determined by the retail consumers targeted and each step back to the paddock would be assessed and monitored to ensure each link in the chain contributed to the desired quality standard.

With its equity holding in Supreme Cattle Company, Minnamurra also has a say in the marketing of the product, which will be conducted with a major meat distributor.

The move into the Speckle Park brand is part of a larger theme across the company, having also registered its Angus brand, Minnamurra Pure, in 2011.

This is a pasture fed beef marketed on its ecologically sustainable credentials which Minnamurra will continue to

market alongside its Speckle product.

Dennis Power, general manager of Minnamurra Pastoral, said the first mob of 650 Angus heifers AI'd to Speckle Parks were recently pregnancy tested with an 84pc conception rate, and calves due in August/September.

"We're planning to AI 650 Angus heifers in May/June, then 650 in August and another 650 in October/November," he said.

Mr Power said he was a huge believer in breeding good females; "if you get the females, the good males will happen."

He had spent 15 years developing a herd of fertile Angus females for Minnamurra.

The next phase, through Supreme Cattle Company, will be to provide cattle that suited the market and get a share of the profits beyond the farm gate.

"We're a commercial operation first and foremost," Mr Reid said.

"Unless the cattle perform and are produced in an economical fashion, it's not profitable, and we go out of business."

Six Star's Greg Ebbeck said the new venture would provide feedback for not just Six Star, but the entire breed.

"This is the biggest opportunity the breed has anywhere in the world."

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