

MEAT THE STAFF: BRUCE CHILD

Bruce Child organises the receivals and kills at the Tongala plant and Graeme Pretty reckons that "he does a wonderful job."

Bruce is the yard supervisor and co-ordinates all the cattle as they come in, supervising the yard workers as well as assisting with the inevitable paperwork and phone calls in the office.

As he says "you've got to make sure that you have the right cattle on the right days. It's a matter of differentiating the cows so that you have a mix of types to match our customer expectations."

Bruce is well-entrenched at the plant, having started in 1995 and worked for 13 years as the nightshift supervisor – from 1pm until 11pm.

"I had worked part-time at the Echuca saleyards for 15 years and I heard that Graeme Pretty was looking for someone to fill in for casual work while a nightshift bloke was on holidays. I've been here ever since."

Bruce and his wife Yvonne live close by in Tongala and run some beef cows and calves of their own. They milked cows – or as Bruce says, "Yvonne milked the cows", up until about four years ago when they decided they needed a break from the dairy.

TOOLAMBA SURVEY

We recently mailed out a survey to 235 past and present customers in the Toolamba area to seek opinions about the service from the liveweight scales centre there.

This is another example of our proactive work with farmers. We really are interested in your input.

If you have other ideas on how we can improve our service to you, please contact us directly or through our website. We listen!

We offered a prize as part of the survey and we've selected a winner. They will be able to take advantage of a \$250 voucher from Ken Dunstall Rural Supplies, Girgarre.

WE'VE DOUBLED THE KILL RATE

We recently increased our daily kill rate to 360 which is a better situation all round for us and our staff.

So please send your culls our way. If you are busy just give Peter Shellie a call on 0428 579 087 – he'll come to your place and pick them up, and give you a cheque on the spot.

ROMPING AHEAD IN TASMANIA

We have been investing heavily in upgrades to our Smithton factory in Tasmania recently, which involved closing down the boning room for two weeks.

The renovations mean that we have increased our kill rate to about 450 cattle per day. And that's good news for the Circular Head area because we will need about 15 to 20 more employees.



Victorian

MEATWORKS MESSENGER

OCTOBER 2010

GREENHAM



WEDNESDAY'S THE DAY AT WAAIA

Don Spence has been buying bobby calves for 40 years and owns the block of land that the Greenham liveweight scales are on at Waaia. He still sets up to buy calves there every Sunday, Monday, Wednesday and Thursday.

"I just get the bull calves," he told us on the day that we called in for a yarn and to take some photos, "farmers are hanging onto the heifers." The mob that he had collected on the day was destined for the Echuca abattoir.

Don is 73 years old and has had the land at Waaia since the 1960s when he moved here to take up sharefarming pigs.

He grew up in Albury and learned the trade as a woolclasser. He spent those formative years working in the big shearing sheds across the Riverina, when the country rode on the sheep's back. "A good life for a young bloke," he declares.

At Waaia he got involved in carting cattle with his stock truck and then moved into the fodder business, cutting and selling lucerne. Don built the yards and the scales and spent about 12 years supplying cattle to all over the region.

"Graeme Pretty rang up one day and wanted to come over here and have a talk. So around 1994

Greenhams set up here. They rent the yard and pay me a cut per cow sold through the scales. Some days we'd have 200 cows - it used to be Mondays and Wednesdays and it'll get back to that. Right now it's just Wednesday.

"I think blokes culled too hard in the tough times with no water or feed, and low milk prices. But we've had good rains in the last few months – and they say there's more coming. Blokes are concentrating on building up their herds again so it's a bit quieter now, but coming back to what it used to be.

"Greenham has changed the attitude of the whole region around here. They've done a good job and I hope people remember it. They contribute to lots of sports clubs and communities – every darn thing that's going!

"You couldn't get a better mob to work for here, especially with paying. The farmers get a cheque on the spot and so do I at the end of the day.

"It's good for the farmers – no curfew, guaranteed weight and prompt payment. It gives them a good choice; and after all they don't have to accept the price that they are offered."

*I love a sunburnt country, a land of sweeping plains,
Of ragged mountain ranges, of droughts and
flooding rains.*

*I love her far horizons, I love her jewel-sea,
Her beauty and her terror – the wide brown land
for me!*

Dorothea MacKellar wrote My Country in 1904. It could just as easily have been written in 2010. For the last decade or more her words about drought have rung loudly in our ears while we wondered whether flooding rains had become a thing of the past.

Now we need wonder no longer. The wonderful rains and flooding of recent weeks has put smiles on faces right across the state and nowhere more so than in the Goulburn Valley which really did bear the brunt of the great dry.

Irrigation districts suffered a double whammy with the loss of both rainfall and the previously reliable water allocations. Now the outlook couldn't be better with the best pasture growth in years and Eildon looking very healthy.

More cattle have been coming through recently and we've taken on extra staff at Tongala to handle the increased numbers. We are still a long way behind pre-drought levels and I don't expect much improvement in the short term while farmers concentrate on rebuilding their herds.

But in the longer term I think we'll see the Goulburn Valley herd will grow again in response to better conditions and prices. There is no question the world needs more food and we have the capacity to grow it.

Despite the horror stories we hear about the American economy, the market for our hamburger meat has remained quite stable over recent months. As always however, much depends on our unpredictable Australian dollar. To some extent we learnt to live with it floating around in the 80s but as it heads into the 90s and possibly higher, we are facing a whole new ball game.

The other part of our business in Tasmania is going very well with its branded premium grass fed beef gaining wide acceptance both here and overseas. We've just made a major investment in improvements to the boning room and chillers that will lead to a significant increase in capacity.

Peter Greenham



LES MITCHELL, ON THE LEFT, AND DON SPENCE SOLVE THE PROBLEMS OF THE DAIRY INDUSTRY AT WAAIA LIVESTOCK SCALES

KANYAPELLA IS AN UNDERCOVER OPERATION

The really impressive thing about Patrick and Shenya McMonagle's dairy operation is their feed lot shed, which can feed 1200 cows at a time, including access to water troughs for 300 of them – all under the one roof.

Patrick and Shenya run Kanyapella Milk Co, just east of Echuca and north of Tongala, milking 1000 cows all year round.

"We don't feed in the bail," explains Patrick, "the cows get 95% of their feed in the feed shed, using multiple troughs and a feed-out wagon. We run three different herds according to their days in milk and we co-ordinate the rations to suit. They all get about the same quantity of dry feed, but we change the amount of high energy ingredients. For instance the smaller cows get less of the 'good stuff'."

A second feed lot, over the road from the main shed, is for the dry cows and younger cattle.

They have been on this 2000 acre property since January 2005. Patrick was born into dairying in New Zealand, and still has a partner in the business, based in NZ.

"We took three years to find this place to suit what we were looking for, we wanted a property close to a major residential centre, and Echuca suits us well.

"All things considered, I think the dairying industry in Australia is far better than in New Zealand, but we've really had a hard time over the last two or three years, most dairyfarmers without a really good relationship with their bank will be hurting.



PATRICK McMONAGLE SENDS ALL HIS CULL COWS TO GREENHAM AND SAYS THAT HE TRUSTS THEM IMPLICITLY.

"The biggest restraint is money. Everything these days seems to cost \$100,000. You need to be able to justify the return on it."

All the cows are Holsteins and average 8500 to 9500 litres a year, but Patrick says that the current lot are getting too big. "We find that they walk too slowly and they have trouble calving. We are addressing that with our breeding programme.

"Calving is from February to November and it can be very difficult, as cows do not cope well calving in wet conditions like we have right at the moment. It's hard on the cows and the staff."

The cows are milked on a 60 stall rotary without automatic cluster removers. This stems in part from Patrick's philosophy that he doesn't believe in the efficiency of automatic teat spraying. Hand-operated teat sprayers are located right around the rotary, so taking the cups off manually doesn't present a problem.

One thing Patrick certainly believes in is his two Lely automatic calf feeders.

"They are the best things I've bought in my life! They have never broken down."

They can raise 300 calves at a time with the aim of getting them to 130kg before weaning. The calves are fed a similar bulk feed mix to the cows 'ad lib' in troughs outside the rearing shed and Patrick says that it means that they have less bedding than any other calf shed he's seen – and it also means less mucking out and replacing.

Kanyapella sends all their cull cows to Greenham, around 100 each year, usually the infirm and infertile, and will look at culling more cows through mastitis in the future.



PATRICK McMONAGLE SAYS THAT HIS AUTOMATIC CALF FEEDERS ARE THE BEST THINGS THAT HE'S EVER BOUGHT.

Patrick firmly makes the point about being very impressed with the people involved with Greenhams.

"I haven't met Peter Greenham yet, but I like his policies and I've seen him go through the recent problems at the plant because of the state of the dairy industry. Graeme Pretty is unique in all the people I've dealt with in this industry and is an excellent stock person. Les Mitchell is good – one phone call - you get a price and Laurie Davis is here on the farm with the truck. We are very happy with this arrangement as it's hard on the cows that have been good milkers over the years to have to load them up and send them away for slaughter.

"I trust Greenhams implicitly – I used to weigh the cows, but I know they do it right by us. In the drought it would have been easy for them to pay \$100 less per cow."

All but about 300 acres of the Kanyapella property is irrigated. They grow winter cereal for silage and have enjoyed good yields through the dry years. It all goes into silage pits. Patrick points out that the most profitable land at the moment is the dryland oats and ryegrass.

It's a 'cut and carry' operation so they grow most of their feed on the farm and only buy in grain, canola and supplements.

For the future Patrick and Shenya are looking to expand by another 300 to 400 cows and they believe that it can be done without any necessary changes to management.

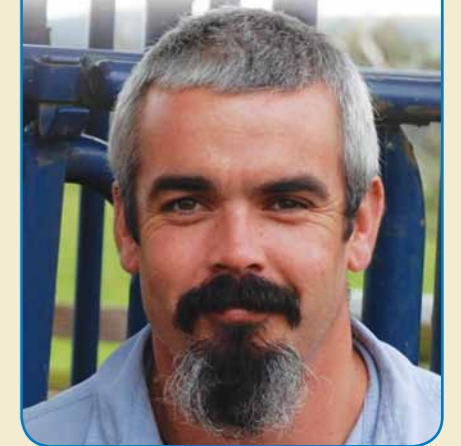
"As long as we get a few relatively normal years with consistent commodity prices."

HE'S BACK!

Danny Sinclair will be a familiar face to many of you from his time at Tongala.

Recently he's been looking after part of our livestock buying for the Tasmanian operation, but he's now back with us at Tongala as part of the livestock team here.

In the short term he'll be looking after the liveweight scales business while Les Mitchell goes in for an operation on his 'dicky hip'.



CURFEWS REALLY COST YOU MONEY!

We recently conducted an on-the-spot trial to see what effect the curfew has on culled dairy cows.

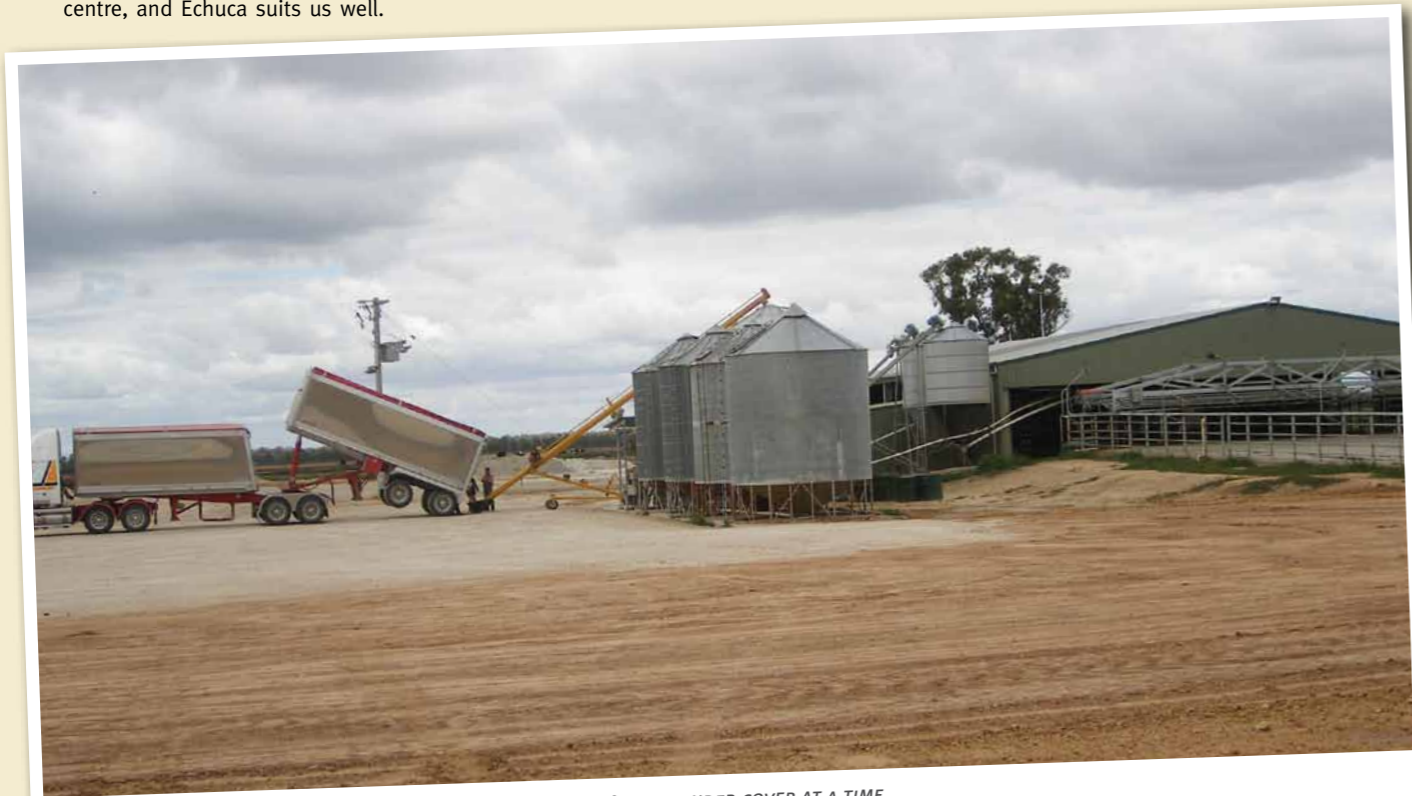
On Tuesday August 10, Peter Shellie picked up 11 Holstein and cross-bred cows from Graham Johnstone's property at Stanhope. That was at about 11am. The cows were weighed going on to the truck and a cheque was paid there and then, based on their liveweight.

The cows were reweighed at Tongala 20 hours later and Graham Johnstone says that the results were 'quite interesting'.

"The average weight loss was 7.04% with one cow losing 11.6%. She was 559kgs when she went on the truck and went down to 494kgs the next day.

This certainly backs up the theory about the curfew. I knew that there would be a weight loss, but it is quite a large amount that you have to take into account if you're selling through the saleyards. Plus the selling fees and the transport."

Graham's heaviest cow, at 700kg, lost 56kgs overnight.



THE HUGE FEED LOT SHED AT KANYAPELLA MILK CO CAN FEED 1200 COWS UNDER COVER AT A TIME.