



Rob and Ainsley McArthur, Mystery Park, St Lawrence, with their children Hamish, Lachlan, Tess, Andrew, Adelaide and Eliza. - Picture SARAH COULTON

## CELL-GRAZING LIFT

**T**HEY were once sceptics about the virtues of cell grazing, but now Rob and Ainsley McArthur, Mystery Park, St Lawrence, are completely sold on the idea.

Along with their six children Tess, Andrew, Lachlan, Hamish, Adelaide and Eliza, the McArthurs run more than 4000 livestock units over 12,000 hectares of ironbark and bluegum coastal country that runs down into alluvial creek flats.

And over time, Mystery Park has been improved with pangola, signal and Callide Rhodes grass, and under-sown with verano and seca stylos.

The McArthurs began by combining mobs of cattle into larger groups and rotating them through existing paddock infrastructure so that only 15 per cent of the country is grazed at any one time.

Recently, they have intensified the cell-grazing system and have divided current larger paddocks with single-wire electric fencing.

"This area was going to be a long and

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costly procedure to re-fence, so single-wire electric fencing has proved to be a winner, with the paddocks feeding into one central watering point," Mr McArthur said.

"The cattle occupy one cell-grazing paddock at a time, while the remaining 15 paddocks are progressing towards a 90-day rest period."

"However, come the summer months, the rest period will reduce back to 45 days for our growing season."

The McArthurs join their Brahman-cross breeders to Angus/Belmont Red bulls for 60 days from December 1.

"The progeny have fertility, market suitability along with adaptability to our coastal environment," he said.

At weights of 320kg to 350kg, both

steers and cull heifers enter a feedlot before being sold to Signature Beef, a marketing and export business owned by Blair and Josie Angus, Kimberley, Clermont.

Mr McArthur said introducing cell grazing had many benefits, but one of the big advantages was the whole family got involved.

"The kids are educated through distance education, so once school is done, they join in the mustering as cattle are shifted between paddocks, while at the same time the cattle respond positively to the regular handling."

Pregnancy testing is carried out in May, and dry breeders are transferred into the trading herd and processed once fat.

The body condition score of lactating cows determines the date of weaning.

Weaners are yard weaned before being tailed out in improved pasture paddocks.

"Rotational grazing provides the same benefits for weaners as they get handled regularly, have access to rested pastures and rotating creates a break in the tick

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cycle. We keep a constant record of what yields our pastures give, how many days they spend being grazed. And as an overall snapshot, our stocking rates are compared based on stock numbers and days per 100mm of rain."

A fourth-generation custodian of Mystery Park, Mr McArthur believed a continuous grazing system was not going to be sustainable.

"Now, some 11 years later, we feel we have the right balance, and it has helped us triple our carrying capacity and further develop Mystery Park.

The McArthurs are firm believers in regular manure testing, as this gives them a result of the digestibility of their pasture.

"The month of August is traditionally our worst month for our pastures, and in 2007 we were sitting on 48pc digestibility," Mr McArthur said.

"We have lifted this over the past seven years to 52pc during the dry season, which is the difference between cattle losing condition and holding condition.

"Each increase in per cent is a huge gain, and it equates to 12kg/ha of beef produced in 2005 to 42kg/beef produced in 2014."

In the middle of last year, the McArthurs diversified their enterprise to include agistment. They are now managing 1500 head of agistment cattle from producers from Collinsville to Biggenden.

"Currently the demand for agistment is there, and we see it as providing a service to other cattlemen, and we manage the agisted cattle on the same lines as we manage our cattle."



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