

On Farm Challenge - a first for Murray Greys

The *Southern Tablelands Murray Grey Group* ran its second annual On Farm Challenge in November. The On Farm judging concept, where cattle are assessed by a travelling judge, has proved very popular in the dairy world. The idea to hold a similar competition in the Southern Tablelands group was suggested by Murray Grey enthusiast and Group Publicity Officer, Amba McGoldrick. Amba was keen to see cattle "Promoted without leaving the farm".

The inaugural competition was held in November 2004 and the results were made public at the Group's Christmas function. Over 100 entries had been presented by 13 Group members and some very close results were recorded. The judge, Greg Wall, from NSW DPI was impressed with the temperaments of the cattle, the milking ability and longevity of the cows.

In 2004 cattle were required to be held in yards or a small paddock for judging. However, the judge found that it was very hard to make a fair assessment of feet in some paddocks so the competition rules were changed in 2005 for cattle to be held in yards. Given the greatly improved seasonal conditions in 2005 this proved a wise decision otherwise it might have been hard to assess udders and legs!

The requirement to have all cattle judged in yards reduced the number of cattle that some Group members could enter in 2005. The number of cattle was down but the quality did not suffer. There were seventy five entries on 11 farms presented to the judge, Jeff House who is the Beef Cattle Officer with the NSW DPI based at Forbes.

Mr House commented, "The presentation and overall quality of the animals put forward for judging was excellent and the participants should be congratulated on their fine effort. The animals were presented in good condition, without being over done, with very few showing the lingering effects of the drought."

"The animals in the top places of each class displayed the traits of structural soundness and muscularity while maintaining a good balance of frame and finishing ability. These animals were very correct in the feet and leg structure and therefore tracked and moved well."

"The female classes consisted of some very balanced and correct heifers showing above average muscling and good frame, while the cow classes continued this trend with some very impressive calves at foot. The quality of the udders and milk supply of all the cows judged was of a very high standard and the longevity of the cows was borne out in the over 10 year class."

Mr House concluded: "The temperament of all the animals was excellent and again the participants should be congratulated on their breeding and handling of the animals."

The 2005 class winners were:

Unjoined heifer	Ian & Narelle Wilcox	AYR PARK WALLFLOWER
Joined heifer	Rod Hoare & Helena Warren	CADFOR PHILIPPA Z66
Cow under 5 with calf	Rochelle & Gary Joyce	SHELLGARDI MISS BRIDGET
Cow 5 to 10 with calf	Glenn & Narelle Oag	ANTOINETTE
Cow over 10 with calf	Bob & Su McCluskey	CLUSKERS M36 & A56
Bull under 2 years	Rochelle & Gary Joyce	MILLWOOD COOPER
Bull 2 to 5 years	Rod Hoare & Helena Warren	NOSTONES CRACKER
Bull over 5	Bob & Su McCluskey	U15
Pen of three steers	Gordon Refshaug	

The overall winner, which was based on the best average percentage score, was the Shellgardi Stud of the Joyce and Pratley families. Shellgardi had won Supreme Bull Exhibit with Millwood Cooper against all breeds at the Crookwell Cattle Expo two weeks prior.

As part of the On Farm Challenge there was a Gate Prize for the property best promoting Murray Grey cattle. The winner was Silver Hills Farm of Oakdale. Not only did they have their stud name but had a large sandwich board with "For Sale Murray Grey Bulls Top Quality". They also had their Johnes MAP sign prominently displayed.

The Southern Tablelands Group will continue with its On Farm Challenge in 2006 and commends the concept to other Breed Promotion Groups.