HOLDING COSTS OF BEEF PRODUCTION IN NORTH QUEENSLAND

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The main priorities for cattle breeders in the arid areas of North Queensland are to produce more by selecting more productive strains of cattle, to improve feed quality by better management of pastures; and to reduce costs, particularly labour. Currently, where cattle graze on open range, capital expenditure on fencing and watering is minimal, but these savings are more than offset by expensive labour costs in mustering and handling cattle. The provision of more fenced paddocks and additional watering points can reduce labour costs while improving management. By this means I have been able to improve pastures, introduce more productive cattle and control cattle tick and worm infestations. In particular, controlled grazing and spelling of pastures, in association with pasture burning at strategic times, enables a balance of more nutritive species such as Kangaroo grass to be maintained in pastures. The quality of dry pasture can be enhanced further by provision of mineral licks to correct deficiencies in mineral intakes, particularly phosphorus.

Controlled burning of pastures is a necessary management strategy in the dry tropics. Firstly, burning provides fire breaks which protect stock and pastures from the effects of uncontrolled bushfires which may occur from time to time. Additionally, burning of old and seeded pastures allows removal of the excess dry matter which is largely unpalatable and has little nutritive value.

My method of pasture management involves grazing of half of the property during any one year. The other half, which is ungrazed, has a high seed production and the excess dry matter is removed by controlled burning just prior to the expected onset of the four month wet season. Following the growth of new feed on the recently burnt area the stock are congregated on this new green feed and the areas grazed in the previous year are able to produce maximum seed and plant reserves.

The integration of these factors provides a means of maintaining a viable grazing industry on range lands unsuitable for agricultural use.

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