

Tarrabah Pastoral Co. wins MSA honours

With a commitment to quality, innovation, and sustainability, Lucy and Gerard Gallagher have been awarded the New South Wales Most Outstanding Small Non-Grainfed Producer in the 2023 MSA Excellence in Eating Quality Awards.

Located 40 kilometres northwest of Tamworth, Gerard and Lucy's operation, Tarrabah Pastoral Co., covers 1,930 hectares, running Angus cattle and 1,500 Merino ewes joined to White Suffolk rams.

Their enterprise also includes some cropping, primarily focused on fodder production, managing a predominantly natural grass pasture improved with fertilisation and clover introduction.

The cattle the Gallaghers consigned for processing over the two-year period of 2021-23 achieved an average MSA Index of XX and MSA compliance of XX%.

Gerard and Lucy became MSA registered producers in 2011 to maximise quality, create market opportunities, and attract price premiums.

Gerard said as a smaller operation, it was a strategic decision for the business to help expand from selling into saleyards into new targeted, more lucrative markets.

"While the feeder market has been good in the last few years, supplying Woolworths remains our long-term target market," Gerard said.

"Our ideal target weight before sale is 530kg liveweight, which we aim to achieve in just a bit over 15 to 16 months.

"We calve starting in July to ensure that the majority of our cattle are weaned early and can be transitioned onto lucerne and sub-tropical pastures over summer then onto winter forage crops in autumn.

"By weaning early, we can ensure that our cows are at least condition score 3 by the time the first frost arrives in April/May. This tight calving window allows for efficient management, tighter weight ranges and early access to quality feed."

The Gallaghers place particular emphasis on genetic improvement through bull selection.

"Selecting traits for meat quality is a key part of our genetic improvement strategy," Gerard said.

"We look at Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs) of bulls we're interested in purchasing, and then select based on visual traits from there.

"We carefully select our bulls based on key criteria such as 400-day weight, eye muscle area, and intramuscular fat. Birth weights and feeding traits are also key traits that we look at.

"Our cow herd is key to our operation. We've found that we now have a very fertile cow herd, with medium frames and good weaning weights.

"MSA has also helped us to unearth the importance and value of data collection.

"We've implemented modern systems like AgriWebb to track cattle movements, withholding periods, and product usage. Particularly since transitioning to a straight Angus herd during the drought in 2018-19, this data-driven approach has helped us continually improve our genetics and management practices."

Effective animal handling is also a key factor in achieving high MSA grading results, according to Lucy and Gerard.

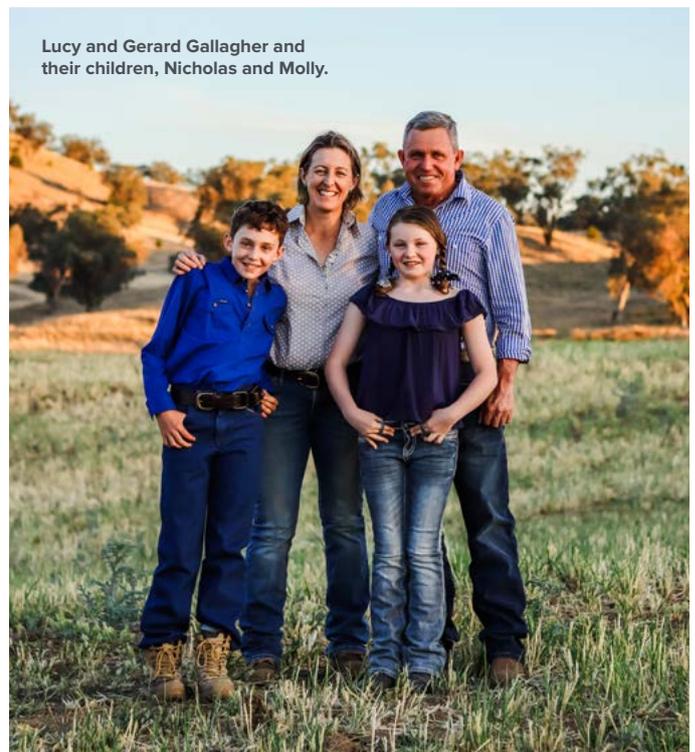
"We emphasise low-stress stock handling and prefer using horses in lieu of using our side-by-sides and dogs for example when moving cows with calves. We strive to maintain a quiet environment for the cattle because animal welfare is a key priority for the business," Lucy said.

"Careful movement of stock, particularly through well-designed laneways, and the use of calming techniques like administering Green Cap supplements, which contain trace elements including electrolytes and magnesium, contribute to their success.



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Lucy and Gerard Gallagher and their children, Nicholas and Molly.



“We employ set stocking for cows most of the time, with rotations onto fresh country when necessary, prioritising saving good paddocks for calving and early weaning. We also yard wean to help keep cattle calm.”

The Gallaghers said being MSA registered producers extends beyond accessing premium markets, helping to keep them both accountable and striving for continuous improvement.

“It’s helps us to better our management practices and sets a good standard around compliance, whether that be around Livestock Production Assurance (LPA) or biosecurity for example,” Lucy said.

“We really value the feedback and performance insights that we receive through MSA, as it allows us to fine-tune our business, helps to reduce costs, and in turn, increase profits.

The Gallaghers said they recognise the importance of raising the bar in terms of compliance and embracing best practice to meet evolving market demands.

“As we’ve grown our business, we’ve focused on creating a strong foundation and building on it,” Gerard said.

“Farming is becoming more challenging. With a growing emphasis on environmental stewardship and carbon, we need to be as compliant as we can, and MSA is helping us do just that.

“MSA has helped us benchmark where we want to be and set the direction of where we want to go. It continues to give us invaluable advice to not only ensure we’re maintaining access to our target markets and delivering a good product, but supports us in building a sustainable, productive, and profitable enterprise.”