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Super Herd Discovered

Quietly plugging away in the backwaters of the Northern Territory brothers Mike and Rory O'Brien believed in their cattle, their Coodardie Brahmans. They are different to the industry standard, different to the modern day conventional and fashionable Brahman.

Whilst Coodardie has always had its small band of loyal supporters their worth has often been overlooked, undervalued and at times even ridiculed. Despite industry and market peer pressure, Mike stood to his principles, ignored the ebbs and flows of fashions and fads and for the past 30 years has bred true to his beliefs—chasing an animal that is inherently fertile, functional and dependable, that yields well, tastes great and is easy to handle—all the while doing this consistently off the grass with little assistance. The fundamental difference being that flat bone, not coarse, heavy and round, is the foundation for all the above to occur.

Seventeen years ago Mike met a man who shared this philosophy and had developed a system to objectively evaluate and select animals which would lead to genetic gain and improvement that met this criteria. That man is Peter Chilcott and the system is Supergene Livestock Evaluation. Mike, his family and brother Rory believed in the principles of Supergene and were willing to subject the entire herd (over 3000 head) to evaluation and act on the results. **Supergene objectively ranks animals on 26 traits grouped into carcass, functional, maternal and palatability. The assessed are identified by bold coloured Supergene eartags – purple being the top ranking animals then blue and pink; yellow for herd animals; and finally green for culls.** In 1989 the Coodardie herd had a mixture of colours but weighted towards the middle of the scale. Mike listened and watched intently and aimed for continual improvement.

Since 1989, the O'Brien Family and their Coodardie Brahmans relocated from North Queensland to the Northern Territory. They have battled drought, excessive wets and treacherous floodplain conditions. It could be said that natural selection has played a large part on the herd and survival of the fittest has applied. The Coodardie herd, formed 30 years ago is based on the old Australian bloodlines of Cherokee and Tyagarah. With the exception of Cherokee and sister studs, Coodardie has remained a closed herd. In the intervening years Mike and Peter lost touch but Mike's interest and belief in Supergene never waned.

Seventeen years on, Mike saw a Supergene field day being advertised at Figtree in North Queensland. Despite that being a busy time of the year on the station, Mike organised an NT delegation and drove nearly 3000km one way to attend the function. The results that Figtree are achieving through the use of Supergene is mind boggling and impressive – a doubling of branding percentage in only a few years (same branding numbers from half the number of cows) plus improved taste and palatability of their steers. This re-energised and enthused Mike and in mid December 2006, he brought Peter Chilcott to the Northern Territory to assess the herd – this time sale and sire bulls. It is fair to say that Peter was blown away with what he saw and felt (much of the assessment is done crush side and by feeling the hide, bone and testicles). The quality of the herd was outstanding. Of the 234 bulls assessed (ranging from 12mths old to mature 14 year old sires) 31 achieved top purple status, 6 of those being double purple. This high a percentage of elite animals has never before been recorded in the 20 years of the Supergene Evaluations world wide. Most breeders are pleased if 1 or 2 of their animals receive the often elusive purple tag. Strongly supporting the Coodardie Purples were 60 blue tags and 43 pink. 68 bulls were culled and the following day all were sent for slaughter via the live export trade or castrated. Included in these was the 2005 Katherine Show Reserve Senior Champion. No favouritism was shown in the bid to make an already good herd even better and more consistent.

The cow herd is next to be scrutinised and evaluated but seeing the animals that they are producing and quick paddock inspection, Supergene founder, Peter Chilcott and the O'Brien Family are rightly excited about the prospects. A truly SUPER herd – a raw diamond - has been discovered and about to receive a tender and loving cut & polish to reveal its true strength, value, beauty and potential.

