

Eaglehawk Farms

"Looking beyond the farm gate"

When asked to host the Landcare Adventure at their property "Ardleigh" the Vivers asked "why us?" In reply, many of us want to know more about how this dynamic family manage their business and farm to continue to grow and flourish in challenging times.

The Vivers operation is unique in many ways but one of the stand out things is how they have diversified their business activities to match the natural resources they have available to work with and then looked outside the boundary fence for innovative ways to maximise the resources they have available.



The Vivers family Ian, Sally, Harry, Annie & Maggie taking a break from mustering, Winter 2008.

The Properties

How long it's been in the family ? "William Vivers settled the 61440 acres known as Kings Plains in 1832. "Ardleigh" and "Weean" were both part of that original property. "Weean" has enjoyed 177 years of Vivers ownership. "Ardleigh" was taken from the Vivers family in the 1950's for Soldier Settlers. John Vivers (Ian's father) was able to buy the property back in 1980."

What the property was initially used for? "Both properties were predominately used for grazing Merino and Crossbred sheep as well as Hereford/Angus cows. Ian and Sally started operating "Ardleigh" in 1994 followed by "Weean" in 2004."

Ian and Sally Vivers run Eaglehawk Farms on their properties "Ardleigh" and "Weean" Glen Innes. The properties are located 43 km north west of Glen Innes in the Kings Plains Valley. It encompasses an area of 4,000 acres including "Ardleigh" & "Weean" and a leased property "Windemere" .

The property is a diverse mix of improved and native pastures, with good stands of remanent vegetation throughout the property. Pasture species are predominantly Danthonia, microleana, red grass. Phalaris, rye, fescue, red and white clover and lucerne. The Viver's also opportunity grow fodder crops for winter feed and as a part of on-going pasture development program. This year they have already oversown pasture with oats in a trial form of pasture cropping to see how it works in practise.



An example of the remanent vegetation throughout the property, a popular location for local bee boxes.



Snapshot

Elevation 928m above sea level

Average annual rainfall- 800mm

Soil types: mix of black basalt alluvial flats to basalt undulating hills

Pasture species: both native and introduced Danthonia, microleana, red grass. Phalaris, rye, fescue, red and white clover and lucerne

Enterprises: Registered Angus & Senepol, branded beef product "Eaglehawk Farms Prime Angus Beef" Beefmark- Embryo transfer breeding centre, Consultancy service, broad acre cropping, Custom Feedlot.

Marketing tools: internet based marketing Auctions Plus, website for both Eaglehawk Angus & Beefmark Services, producer alliance group, print media billboards, word of mouth and television.

Biggest challenge for the future ? Will be to manage costs and increase returns in an environment of increasing Government intervention and cost burden. To do all of this whilst continuing to be environmentally sensitive and aware.

GLENRAC: Glen Innes Natural Resources Advisory Committee
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The Cattle Enterprise

The couple run Eaglehawk Angus Stud and also the country's largest Registered Senepol breeding herd and operate a large on-farm embryo transfer and artificial insemination centre in a revamped wool shed.

The Angus herd consists of 420 head of registered females, in addition to 160 head Senepol herd. The Senepol herd started only four years ago after Ian discovered that there was a shortage of Senepol bulls available for northern Australia cattle producers seeking the breed for use in Brahman based herds. Last year they sold 54 Senepol bulls direct to producers across Australia, most heading to the far north.



Senepol calves and sire at "Ardleigh"

The Properties

The Viver's also run 200-head of cows used as recipients in their AI & ET programs. They place their own and client's embryos into these cows and then grow out the calves until weaning time when the calves are then delivered to the client. The AI & ET business is operated under the Beefmark name and also offers the groundbreaking service of sexing embryos for clients.



Recipient cows and Droughtmaster calves at foot.

The challenge of running an average of 800 cows on 4,000 acres in conjunction with a cropping enterprise is obviously a big one, particularly in below average years. As part of a drought management plan the Vivers often agist cattle on local properties during the (summer months) and return to the home property over winter to calve out. Adjacent to the feedlot is a "winter feeding area" where cows can be confined fed a basic ration during critical times to spare pasture paddocks and maintain herd health.



The winter feeding area near the feedlot for supplementary feeding breeders.

They are in the process of commissioning a commercial boning and packing room in Glen Innes to value add their own branded beef product, Eaglehawk Farms Premium Angus Beef. Future plans include the expansion of the Eaglehawk Farms branded product into lamb, honey and other fresh farm produce.



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The Feedlot

As part of an integrated enterprise the Vivers also operate a 1,000-head feedlot where they offer custom feeding services for clients as well as feeding their own cattle. Most cattle fed at the feedlot are destined for the domestic market.



Cattle feeding at bunks in the feedlot

Why did you set up the feedlot? "The feedlot came about for a number of reasons. Mainly we saw an opportunity to better utilise our land and labour resources by establishing a more intensive area for both breeding and finishing. As we have been involved in a lot of embryo implanting it seemed logical that by managing in a more confined area and with a controlled diet we would be able to firm up our results. In addition we saw the alluvial plain below the feedlot as a tremendous resource for growing corn. Every animal turned off "Ardleigh" and "Weean" would be turned off in prime condition. It also gave us the ability to collect manure and return it, in a measured way, back to the soil".

Integrated business from embryo to plate? Why you want to take it to the next level instead of just growing beef. "Opportunity and desire. We have been involved in all aspects of production from embryo to the finished market. Our focus has always been on quality without compromise. Our prime cattle have then ended up lumped in with sub standard beef sold on the same shelf. We see a tremendous opportunity to stand our product alone and allow people to benefit from eating the quality of beef we have always eaten."



Loading the feed mixer for another feed out.

The Crops

In the past "Weean" was operated as a sheep property, it now grows cereals and corn on the alluvial flats. These crops produce hay, silage and "earlage" that is then used in the feedlot. The Vivers utilise the services of local agronomists and sophisticated farm mapping software to monitor soil nutrient status and any broad acre applications of fertiliser or herbicides for future reference.

The Vivers have recently purchased a 6 metre Schulte slasher/mulcher to allow them to mulch corn stubble back into the cropping land to help build organic matter and retain as much moisture as possible. They have also found it useful in controlling unwanted St Barnaby thistle which is dominant in the area.

The slasher/mulcher will also play a large part in improving soil carbon levels albeit from an already relatively high level. Part of the business plan for the purchase of the slasher/mulcher was to be able to contract out to other local farmers with similar needs and challenges.



The new mulcher in action, helping to better incorporate stubble into the ground.



The early stages of the corn crop.



Harvesting the corn crop.



Delivering the chopped earlage into pits at the feedlot.

The Future

The future for young people? "Agriculture will be a boom industry of the future. A lot of the technology and job descriptions going forward for young people in agriculture haven't been invented yet. Population growth will secure a future for food production and therefore a future for our kids in agriculture."



Your vision for the farm in 50 yrs? "In 50 years this operation will still be a family owned concern. We will have expanded in terms of land and cattle resources managed all producing top quality farm products for a string of Eaglehawk Farms Shops."

For further information on the Vivers family and their diverse enterprises visit their websites.

Eaglehawk



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