



# Knowles Feed Lot - Beef Cattle and Maize Malanda

**Name:** Bill Knowles

**DOB:** 31/12/62

## **Who is in your farming family?**

My wife Jackie is a school teacher, but she helps on the farm when she can. I have 2 kids. Sammy is 19 and at Uni and Dan is 15 and goes to boarding school. Whenever they can, they help out – anything from driving a tractor to shifting cattle. They are very helpful, it's a shame they aren't here most of the time now.



Our 2 dogs are Baxter and Royce. We have three black cats, Midnight, Blazer and Torture. We don't have as many pets anymore – the chooks have gone and we used to have a goat that thought it was a dog.

## **Where is your farm and what do you farm?**

We're situated half-way between Atherton and Malanda on the Atherton Tablelands. We have 250ha where we grow beef cattle and maize.



All of our maize goes back into our cattle as feed in our feed lot. We use the cut maize to make silage. It's a process of harvesting the maize, then piling it into huge pits, excluding the oxygen so it won't compost, it cures and turns into silage. It's very nutritious food for cattle.



We buy in Brahman cross cattle, then feed them up for market. We turn out about 1700 to 1800 cattle a year. I buy them in at about 380kg weight per animal and fatten them up to 580kg. It takes about 130 days.

## **What is your farming background?**

After school, I went and did other things for about 5 years. I'm not sure what brought me back to the farm. The farm has been in the family 4 generations, since 1932. My Grandfather bought the farm and set it up as a dairy farm and over the years my father also grew some small crops like potatoes. We ran the dairy for a long time until 2005 stopping not long after Dairy De-regulation came in. Then we went into beef.



A sideline to our business on the farm is silage. We have a machine that makes the silage. We contract cut silage for everyone on the Tablelands. That's our business from March till June. In May/June we buy cattle in and work with them through till December/January. January is when we plant all the maize, and it's a simple rotation like that through the year.



### **Farming Memories - What has been so special for you living on a family farm?**

We were always making things as kids. We used to make canoes to go down the creeks, go-karts to go down our steep hills. We always had lots of other kids our age around. A favourite past time was to make toy guns and play war games.

When we were about 10, 5 of us went up the creek on our own on a camping trip. All we had taken was a tarp, no tent or mattresses. We couldn't cook anything, we'd just take bread and baked beans or something like that to eat. On this occasion, one of my mates got stung by a catfish! It happened about 6.30 at night, in the dark. We were all too scared to try and make it home at night, so he spent the whole night in a lot of pain. If we had known, we could have put his foot into warm water, because that eases the sting, but we didn't know that.

Farm life was great for us kids, we had slug guns. We had an old jeep we used to drive everywhere. It was great fun. Your friends always wanted to come out for the weekend. There was always heaps to do.

**Farming Life Experiences - Family farming presents many challenges which often involve considerable effort to resolve. What experiences can you recall which presented you and your family with a significant problem?**



Dairy de-regulation was a huge problem for us. This is where the price for milk, which was always protected or regulated, was taken away. That increased the competition and milk that was able to be produced more cheaply elsewhere, took over the market. Local dairy farmers lost out because they couldn't compete. It has taken around 10 years for the industry to recover. In 2000 there were 210 Tablelands dairy farmers, now there are 48.

Leading up to de-regulation, I was in a partnership with my brother, and my parents were also still part of the farm. De-regulation meant reduced income which caused quite a few problems and differences of opinions. It resulted in the splitting up of my partnership with my brother. The good thing was that we both ended up happy. It wasn't a good thing to go through at the time, but now we are still very close. It just took us a while to work it all through, that's all.

### **Looking Back - What lessons were learnt? What has your farming life taught you?**

It gives you a great lifestyle, but be careful you don't get in a rut. Any job can do it to you, but dairy farming is a good example. You get up, you milk the cows, you've got that much to do and you don't think about your other possibilities. Opportunities are there, you just have to be willing to try them.

From my farming experience, you don't have to know everything. You can go out and find the information you need, or the right technical people, the hard part is sorting through all the information you can get. You can do anything with your farm.



## **International Vets Tour Knowles Feedlot**

**There is a World Vet Tour on in Cairns at the moment. I've got 150 vets coming to my place to check out how we go about feeding our cattle in the feed lot. A lot of them probably have not seen a feed lot. A lot of them are from Japan, Asia and New Zealand, where there are not many feedlots. Also not many people have seen silage and how we use it. We feed lupins, guar and molasses. All the nutrition is worked out on a computer program to balance the protein and energy components of the feed. I send samples away to Brisbane to have it analysed and I will show the vets the results I get back. So they will find that interesting - what we feed them and how we mix it. They will also be interested in the various treatments for diseases and pests like ticks, Three Day Sickness and Botulism that we give our cattle as they come into the feedlot.**