

*the* **ARCHIBULL** PRIZE

# ALL IN THE FAMILY



Imagine for a moment that for the past four generations your family has worked together; not only that but work and home are in the same place and how you do your job has a direct impact on your income. Such is the life of the Bruce family who run three farms near Cumnock in central NSW.



*Photo by Mary Canning*

Don and his brother split the original farm in the mid-1980s and have subsequently purchased more land to increase the property to its current size of 1950ha.

Set on undulating, rolling hills on three different farms, the Bruce family properties, "Meriwong", "Myrangle" and "Rangoon" are mixed farming enterprises producing wool, meat, and grain.

Two of the farms are operated as breeding farms and the other for cropping and fattening stock.

Don Bruce and his two sons breed Merinos and Merino first and second-cross for wool and prime lamb sheep for meat. The farm runs approximately 3000 ewes, but this can increase up to 5500 when conditions are good.

They run about 100 Shorthorns and 50 Wagyu-Angus cattle. The grass-fed herd is kept small due to the unpredictable export market for Wagyu. The Wagyu are bred with the Angus to produce F1 and F2 cross (Wagyu bull x Angus Cow = F1, Wagyu bull x F1 female = F2).

The farms crop oats for on farm use and canola for sale. The family has always operated as graziers and croppers but other enterprises such as pigs and goats have also operated on the farm, but finished when they were not economically sustainable.

Grazing management has become a priority. In the last eight years 'Meriwong' has moved to rotational grazing. Don aims to operate with 100% ground cover and has achieved this 95% of the time through careful grazing and stock management.

The farm aims to raise animals predominately on pasture, and only feeds grains for production, not for animal maintenance. Oats grown on the farm is used for finishing lambs and feeding ewes during lambing.

By keeping watch over the farm's health from the ground up, Don seeks to keep his mixed farm enterprise up among the top 10% of producers. Photo monitoring, long-term historical charts and rainfall data are some of the tools he uses to keep an eye on things.

The Bruce family have always sought to keep up with new innovations and management practices. Field days, Landcare groups, ABC rural radio and other farmers are all used as information sources.

Don Bruce seeks to keep his property at the forefront of production, profitability and sustainability for one very simple – and very important reason. "I feed and clothe the world," he said.

## SOME FACTS FOR THOSE WHO LIKE THEM:

- **Rainfall** although shifting, is reliable and consistent. On average the property receives 625mm annually and 40-50mm a month. And while the rainfall pattern has shifted to become more of a summer rainfall, Don's view is: "if things are bad on my property, they must be a lot worse elsewhere!"
- Across the properties **soils** range from heavy red, to siliceous sands, to black. Each soil type is managed differently to make best use of its structure and properties.
- A while back acidity loomed as the main soil-based problem. Levels of pH4 were commonly found in some areas of the farm. **Soil pH levels** are now up to between pH5 and pH6. Regular application of lime and ensuring good ground cover helped improve pH levels.
- **Soil testing** is undertaken twice in each cropping phase of three to five years, once at the beginning of the phase and again mid-way through. Fertilisers are applied as required, but land is returned to pasture as soon as possible after cropping. Fertiliser use has been cut back, largely due to costs.
- The farm has a dual **watering system** which consists of dams and a back-up system of bores, tanks, and troughs. A mobile solar pump is used to pump water to the troughs across the farm.
- Piezometers are used to monitor the **water table**. Over the past three and a half years Don's regular monitoring has seen a rapid fall in the water table.
- The farm is run using family labour, but the farm is a net exporter of **labour**, with all men doing contract work off-farm at times. The farm can operate on 1.5 labour units if required. The yards for both sheep and cattle have been built so that they can be worked by a single operator. Certain jobs, however, require all family members, such as lamb-marking, and fortnight of shearing.

See video footage of Don and his farming practices here <http://ps3beta.com/story/14715>

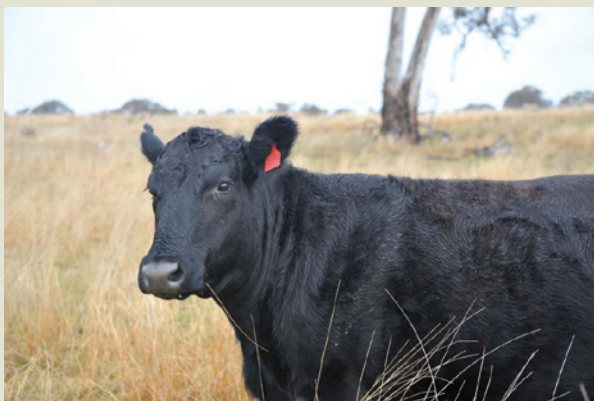


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*The Archibull Prize would like to thank Mary Canning for allowing us to use some of her magnificent photographs. See more of her amazing work at [www.marycanning.com](http://www.marycanning.com)*