

Herefords

AUSTRALIA

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INNOVATION WITH
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Australia

Provenir revolutionising Australian livestock industry

By Kim Woods

Hereford beef is playing a key role in the launch of an Australian-owned disruptive ag-tech company with a collective concern for animal welfare and food provenance. Provenir has set out to revolutionise the Australian livestock industry by introducing an on-farm processing solution providing the highest animal welfare by eliminating the need for live animal transport before processing.

The company is building Australia's first vertically integrated, commercially licensed mobile abattoir to process livestock at the point of production - on the farm where they were raised.

The Provenir value chain starts with on-farm purchase of livestock and processing in the mobile abattoir, through to artisan butchery, and distributing the packaged and retail-ready Provenir co-branded beef into retail, food service outlets and online sales direct to consumers.

The company offers beef producers a feedback loop between farmer and consumers, true digital provenance of each animal, co-branding opportunities to promote their enterprise, and same day processing data on stock. Founder and chief executive officer Chris Balazs knew there had to be a better way of processing livestock.

"Mobile processing makes so much sense, for farmers, for livestock and consumers. It's the way of the future for red meat in Australia," Mr Balazs said.

"We understand for today's consumer, knowing the provenance of their food, how it was produced, and whether it meets their personal values, is imperative to their purchasing decision.

"Provenir's on-farm processing is the answer to the rapidly growing market of conscientious consumers.

"The company's technology will eliminate live transport prior to processing and the associated stress on the animal, resulting in meat of exceptional quality, taste and tenderness."

At the 2017 SproutX accelerator ag-tech program, Provenir won both the judge's and people's choice awards at a Shark Tank style pitch event in front of a crowd of over 250 investors, press and agricultural industry representatives.

The company launched a crowd funding campaign and received pledges worth a total of \$68,166, more than double the original campaign target of \$33,000.

The crowd funding campaign received an enthusiastic response from 298 supporters, with 224 of the company's beef meat packs pre-sold as part of the campaign.

The mobile processing unit has taken 18 months of development, with the first cattle processed at Holbrook in early June.

Cattle weighing 450-500kg liveweight are loaded one at a time via a ramp into a semi-trailer to be enclosed in a knocking box featuring design elements from animal behavior scientist Dr Temple Grandin.

The entire unit can accommodate three bodies at a time and process 10-12 cattle per day. Provenir is looking to form ongoing partnerships with farmers turning off around 100 head a year.

"The innovation in the unit is taking the cattle through the normal processing pathway in a relatively confined space," Mr Balazs said.

"The roof extends upwards by 2.2m so a full beast can be hung."

The carcasses are loaded into a refrigerated vehicle for transport to an artisan butcher in Bannockburn.

"We are interested in taking older cows as restaurants like the complex flavour profile of dry aged beef from a well kept cow," Mr Balazs said.

"This gives farmers an opportunity to cull older cows to Provenir and replenish breeding stock.

"Provenir is an integrated business so we acquire the meat from our partner farmers, process it and sell it under the Provenir brand.

"We are working with 11 partner farmers for the first six to nine months but we have a queue of other farmers intrigued by the concept."

Provenir is not breed-specific and is working with a mixture of beef breeds.

"We want to be clear with our consumers about what animal they are eating, whether that be Hereford, Angus or Shorthorn, as each of them have a different finished product and flavour," Mr Balazs said



"Our understanding of the farmer's breed selection, program and finishing techniques allows us to communicate that through to the consumer.

"We look forward to the time when we can develop a terroir of beef like wine where people can enjoy attributes of the meat we produce.

"This may be an idealistic aspiration to have but it has worked for wine - a generation and a half ago, the choice was red or white - and we see that as an opportunity in the beef market as well."

Mr Balazs said the company needed to launch the mobile processing unit in NSW first from a regulatory standpoint. This is being done in conjunction with the Holbrook based regenerative farming group, 8 Families.

He said crowd funding was focused on supporting the manufacture of multiple processing units.

The nose to tail operation will see bones supplied to stock merchants, and edible and inedible offal to pet food manufacturers.

"The product is grassfed but we do allow infield grain-assist in times of drought," Mr Balazs said.

"We don't do lot feeding - it is about free range and all of our own farmers do grain-assist as a matter of last resort.

"I'm pleased to say Herefords will be one of the first breeds to be processed and all the beef we produce will clearly state whether it is Hereford, black baldy or whatever."

Chris Balazs has a corporate science background but switched to running Herefords at Bannockburn, near Geelong.

He sold the grassfed, HGP-free and ethically raised beef under the brand SAGE (Sustainable Agricultural Grassfed Enterprise) Farm at farmers markets and through an on-farm boutique outlet.

"What frustrated me no end was the processing as I had no control over it," he said.

"Processing is centralized around major population centres requiring cattle to be transported further."

He said customers were concerned with animal welfare issues around transport and were keen to know the provenance of the beef.

"I always knew this would be complex and difficult but we have a team with a real passion to get the project finished," Mr Balazs said.

"We did extensive market research a year ago and it validated our suspicion that this was something that consumers wanted."

Riverina Hereford breeder John Doyle is one of the first Provenir partnering suppliers.

Mr Doyle, of Berrigan, runs a herd of 120 Glentrevor blood autumn calving cows and usually turns off grassfed steers at 500kg liveweight into prime markets at Wodonga, Finley and feedlots.

The cattle are finished on grazing cereals and irrigated pastures of lucerne, phalaris, clover and ryegrass.

In the past he has supplied steers to Finley High School for the Melbourne Royal hoof and hook to competition to obtain feedback on his breeding program.

Mr Doyle selects his bulls on low birthweight, milk, growth and eye muscle area.

He said the mobile processing unit would give immediate carcass feedback.

"We are not using any antibiotics or growth promotants, and we know our beef is tender," he said.

"We have steers aged over 12 months, 400-450kg, fed on sudax, hay and silage ready for the first on-farm processing.

"Our beef will end up with a link (QR code) on the packaging so consumers can see a story on our production system."

BELOW LEFT TO RIGHT:

Riverina Hereford breeder John Doyle is one of the first Provenir partnering suppliers.

Mobile processing units can accommodate three carcasses at a time on-farm.

Chris Balazs likes the Hereford temperament and doing ability.

Grassfed Hereford beef processed and packed under the Provenir vertically integrated system.

