

## DNAdvocate: Gaining ground in the genetics game

Geoff Maynard runs his hands over the smooth coat of a 5 Star Senepol bull. With a practised flick of the wrist, he extracts a small portion of tail hair destined for GeneSTAR® MVP™ analysis to test for feed efficiency, marbling and tenderness.

DNA-marker technology has become integral to the Maynard's quest to produce a *Bos Taurus* breed that offers extremely high-quality meat, yet has the heat tolerance and tick resistance to thrive in tropical and subtropical environments.

"We're always looking for something that will give us an edge in the genetics game and we're confident this DNA technology fits the mould," he says.

Geoff Maynard was born on the family property "Mount Eugene", 50 kilometres north of Biloela at Jambin in the Callide Valley. His parents Patrick and Estelle established the acclaimed Mount Eugene Belmont Red stud there almost 40 years ago. In taking over

the operation, Geoff and his wife Alison expanded the gene pool with the introduction of the African/British breed, Senepol.

### Consistent performance

At the end of the 1990s, Geoff commercialised the breed in Australia by importing 500 Senepol embryos from the United States. Today, he says 5 Star is producing bulls with productive traits that are suitable, desirable and presentable to the Northern Australian environment.

"We've had six annual 5 Star Senepol sales at Gracemere and they have been very consistent," Mr Maynard says. "Last year, for instance, the bulls averaged \$5,500 with 100 percent clearance in a market that was pretty tough for all breeds."

Geoff Maynard says the repeat buyers from northwestern Queensland and the Northern Territory are most encouraging. "There were a number of people who tried one or two Senepol bulls about

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three years ago. This time they came back and bought six, seven, eight bulls each."

### Increasing selection pressure

5 Star has been able to increase its numbers dramatically through embryo transfer and the acquisition of the Hazeldean Benchmark Senepol herd in 2006, which combined the largest and second-largest purebred Senepol herds in the country.

Mr Maynard says the larger lines of cattle are enabling them to increase their selection pressure.

"It is important to give buyers a good selection of genetics, with emphasis placed on economically relevant traits, such as fertility, growth, muscling, temperament, tenderness and marbling," explains Mr Maynard. "With more animals in the herd we are now confident that we can place pressure to greatly improve the productivity of the Senepol breed."

Part of the selection process is based on GeneSTAR testing, which Mr Maynard has used since its inception. He says the technology is rapidly improving. "If we look back five years ago the testing with two genes was a bit like the Model T Ford; now Pfizer Animal Genetics is offering a 56-marker panel test."





MR GEOFF MAYNARD  
5 STAR SENEPOL

Over 400 animals in the 5 Star herds have been through the GeneSTAR evaluation program analysing the animals for DNA markers for feed efficiency, marbling and tenderness. Generally, the Senepol has performed very well, especially in the area of tenderness and feed efficiency.

“We think we can’t go wrong in ensuring the bulls we supply have a high standard of tenderness or meat quality genes in them,” says Mr Maynard.

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Geoff Maynard opens the gate to let more cattle down the race as he explains. “As a bull supplier we have to be ahead of the game because what we’re breeding now is what we are selling in three year’s time, and it has to meet market expectations in the sale ring.”

He says the DNA markers enable them to do just that. “If we have two animals with good genetic merit for growth, fertility and temperament and one ranks higher for tenderness, then we’re definitely going to head towards the tenderness. Down the track we believe it is going to be a given in the meat industry because everyone will benefit from having a genetically tender product.”

Competing recently in the Callide Dawson Carcase Competition, the Maynard family took home notable awards including Best Liveweight Gain in Feedlot, Champion Grassfed Heifer Carcase and Most Successful Exhibitor. This success has proven Senepol-cross animals are holding their own against other breeds.

Mr Maynard is confident it won’t be long before DNA markers are identified to test for tick and parasite resistance, carcase yields and fertility, both in early puberty and the longevity of reproduction.

“There is no doubt the technology is getting stronger and stronger and is probably at the threshold now where people are really taking a serious look at it.”