

# LIVESTOCK



**FAMILY AFFAIR:** Mallee farmers Josh and Peri McIntosh (back) with their Border Park Organics Hereford beef herd and their seven children - (middle) Eliana, 14, Aleida, 10, Elias, 8, Abran, 12, (front) Aurelia, 2, Malachi, 4, and Gilead, 6.

## Santa-crosses boast impressive growth

THE McIntosh family mainly use Poll Herefords in their beef operation at Taplan, but 18 months ago decided to trial a Santa Gertrudis bull from local Nangaringa stud across half their herd.

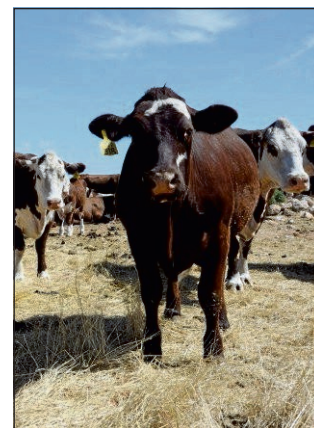
"We were looking for a cross with easy calving, early growth rates through hybrid vigour, good pasture feeding ability and a good yield," Josh McIntosh said.

"The crossbred calves were about six weeks younger than the straight Hereford calves, but yet they caught up quickly and are all pretty well on par.

"They (Santas) have good feed conversion on natural pasture, which we need because we don't feed grain."

The calves weigh about 550 kilograms at present, aged 16-18 months.

As a MSA-registered property, Mr McIntosh was intrigued as to how the



**TRIAL:** Santa-cross.

Santa-cross beef would cut and taste compared to the straight Hereford.

"We taste test every batch we send out under the Border Park Organics brand," he said.

"Taste and temperament will have a lot to do with whether we continue breeding with Santas or not.

"As for growth, we are quite impressed with them."

# Organic effort pays premium

BY ALISHA FOGDEN

LIVESTOCK plays an integral role in the McIntosh family's organic mixed farm in the Mallee, particularly for weed control and nutrient cycling in cropping paddocks.

But more recently, demand for their lamb and beef has increased after the launch of their new Border Park Organics website.

Josh and Peri McIntosh crop about 800 hectares and run a 350-ewe self-replacing Merino flock and 40-breeder

Poll Hereford herd at Taplan, via Loxton.

The McIntoshes moved from NSW to the Mallee in 2011 as part of a succession plan with John and Jenny Schwarz, who were looking to retire.

The 2393ha property had been certified organic since 1996 and the McIntoshes were keen to continue on the organic path.

After taking ownership of the farm in 2014, the McIntoshes launched the website.

"The Schwarzes had been

providing smaller amounts of meat for friends, and we wanted to make it more widely available," Mr McIntosh said.

"Marketing direct to customers seemed the best way to meet the need for affordable organic meat online."

The McIntoshes were amazed at how quickly the brand grew.

"We went from selling six cattle a year to all our young stock - about 20 a year - and 150 sheep," he said.

John Schwarz started the

Border Park Poll Hereford herd in the 1970s, based exclusively on Oak Downs and Kerlson Pines bloodlines.

It is a closed herd, with only bulls bought in for genetic diversity.

"The bulls have to be put in a quarantine paddock for three weeks before being allowed in the organic herd," Mr McIntosh said.

"Those bulls will never be classed as organic, but their progeny born on the property will be. Genetics is the only thing we can introduce from

a non-organic property. The same applies to rams."

Calcookara rams from Cowell are used to target bare breech, while Leahcim and Gunallo rams are bought for their wool qualities.

Mr McIntosh said they kept a straight Merino flock for ease of management, a passion for wool and customer expectations.

"Our range of lamb sausages have been very popular," he said.

"We provide lamb, hogget and mutton, along with or-

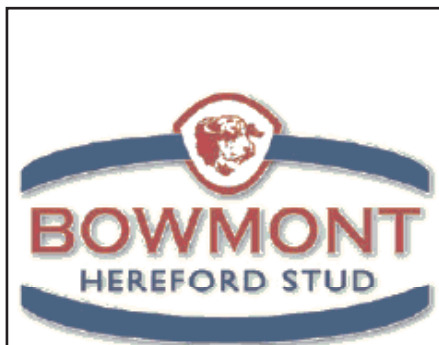
gan meats, bones and suet."

Beef and lamb products are sold across SA, Vic and the NT, and NSW next year.

Mr McIntosh said their organic meat was a lot darker than non-organic meat because it was "slow grown and pasturefed."

"The fat is more yellow, rather than white, which is a negative in MSA grading, but our organic clients look for these characteristics as it has a different flavour compared to grainfed meat," he said.

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