

Passing the taste test

By KIM CHAPPELL

IT WAS sampling his own product that convinced a Southern Highlands farmer that selling his own brand of meat was better than just a good idea.

Simon Philp, of Spring Hill Beef, at Burrawang, killed his first steer only about three years ago, and on tasting the result thought, "This is the nicest beef I've ever had".

The test – from a grass-fed, hormone-free black Angus, produced on his 43-hectare (108-acre) property – kick started what has become an impressive business.

"I didn't know anything about cattle," he said.

But he had family and friends in Sydney he could sell his meat to.

When they reacted positively, he enlisted the help of a Mittagong butcher, bought a van, and started selling the meat "properly".

He joined forces with fruit and vegetable home-delivery companies on the northern beaches to distribute the meat, and the business grew.

Today Mr Philp kills four to six steers a week, services a 1000-strong customer base

and runs the business with the help of his brother, Cameron, and a family friend, Chris Stivano.

Cattle are slaughtered at 18 months, at about 450 kilograms to 500kg.

"They are nice, big young black Angus that don't have much fat on them."

The meat is then hung for 14 to 16 days, de-boned and cryovaced.

"The meat lasts two weeks so people don't need to eat it on the spot."

It was this long shelf-life that attracted many people to his home-delivered product.

His distribution area has spread now to Canberra, Batemans Bay, the Blue Mountains, Newcastle and Sydney, and from May will be expanded to Melbourne, with a Brisbane and Gold Coast distribution to start in June.

"It's been enormous, it's really kicked on."

Spring Hill Beef is also present at a range of markets, including Pymont, North Sydney, Fox Studios, Frenchs Forest and Manly.

"The markets go well." Mr Philp said as promotion testing, meat sampling trays with about \$300 worth of

meat were consumed for free during the course of a day.

To give his business a further boost, Mr Philp has also launched an online ordering service on the company website.

Not that selling goods is foreign ground.

In a previous life, he owned an IGA Supermarket in Fairlight, near the Sydney beachside suburb of Manly.

But after his middle son fell seriously ill and the family spent many hours at the hospital, Mr Philp decided it was time for a change.

"It was one of those things you go through, it's a life changing moment."

Within a month of his son leaving hospital, Mr Philp had sold the business and the family moved to the Southern Highlands; that was three and a half years ago.

Knowing nothing about cattle, he learnt asking locals at the pub and neighbours – "they helped me out left, right and centre".

It was six months before he slaughtered his first steer.

His land proved ideal for the venture.

Last year the area received 2540 millimetres (100 inches), which left



Cameron and Simon Philp, Spring Hill Beef, Burrawang, with their butcher, Rob Williams (centre), Williams Quality Meats, Mittagong.

their pasture fertile and lush.

Mr Philp now runs 68 black Angus on his land and also agists cattle on another 81ha (200ac).

Business is growing at such a rate he now takes in beef from other local farmers, which in turn will allow him to continue expanding.

"I'm thinking it's going to get that busy."

The rise in popularity of organic products has helped.

While Spring Hill Beef isn't organic – Mr Philp still drenches – the meat is sold largely on its grass-fed and hormone-free credentials.

"What I realised in Sydney was that most beef sold there was grain fed at a feedlot, and it's just a different process."

Getting his customer numbers up to where they are now has also given him "the clout" he needed to

approach fruit and vegetable home delivery companies interstate to strike up agreements.

These companies deliver their goods in the morning, and deliver beef for him in the afternoon, providing cross-promotion for both companies.

"They are essentially the same as me, which means we can help each other bring in customers."



Simon and Cameron Philp load one of their delivery vans.



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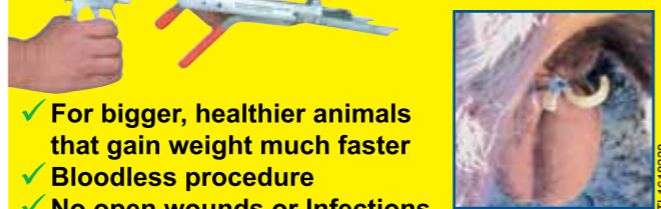
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