

Built for Scale: Shorthorn Females Driving Productivity Across the Mulga

by Charlotte Nugent

In extensive rangeland systems, commercial success is rarely driven by trends or novelty. Instead, it is built on genetics that consistently perform, season after season, under pressure. For Cameron and Rachel Greig, operating alongside Rachel's father George Mack across Weemabah Pty Ltd in the Mulga Belt of north-western New South Wales and south-western Queensland, Shorthorn genetics continue to underpin a breeding program focused squarely on fertility, resilience and market flexibility.

Spanning approximately 700,000 acres across Moombidary, Karto, Wathopa and Boodgherree, the operation currently runs around 3,500 breeders. While the scale is significant, the philosophy is simple: cows that get in calf, raise a viable progeny and do it repeatedly, regardless of seasonal pressure. It is within this framework that the Shorthorn females have cemented herself as a cornerstone of the Weemabah Pty Ltd breeding program.

A Foundation Forged Over Time

Shorthorns have been a part of Moombidary's breeding program for more than three decades. George Mack originally supplied bulls bred at Trangie to the property in the 1990's, before purchasing Moombidary himself and continuing to join Shorthorn bulls over the cow herd.

In more recent years the business has evolved both through succession and expansion, with Cameron and Rachel, stepping into the business. While George remains actively involved in management, Cameron and Rachel now take a more hands-on role in the day-to-day operations and decision making.

"The direction of the business hasn't changed dramatically," Cameron explains. "But as we've taken on more country and more responsibility, it's really reinforced the importance of sticking with cattle that work."

Since stepping into the business, Cameron and Rachel have managed significant expansion, increasing carrying



capacity by approximately fifty percent from 2019 to 2023 through the acquisition of Karto, followed by Wathopa and Boodgherree. This growth generated new opportunities, but also introduced challenges, particularly with respect to sourcing breeding females following the 2018–19 drought.

"That period really tested our breeding philosophy," Cameron reflects. "We were coming out of drought, increasing our landholding and needing to lift numbers quickly. Shorthorn breeders at scale are not easy to find, and that forced us to think carefully about whether we stayed the course."

Matching Genetics to a Demanding Environment

All four properties sit within the Mulga Belt, approximately 200-300 kilometers north-east of Bourke

and south of Thargomindah. Annual rainfall averages around 250 millimetres, with extended dry periods common. Native pastures are dominated by Woollybutt and Neverfail grasses, supported by seasonal herbages when conditions allow.

Large paddocks and long distances mean cattle must be able to travel freely for feed and water, with infrastructure designed to limit walking distances to no more than four kilometres. Even so cattle must maintain function and condition in an environment that leaves little room for inefficiency.

The current breeder herd comprises approximately 80 per cent Shorthorn females with the remaining 20 percent Droughtmaster, a legacy of post-drought restocking from Central Australia in 2020, and more recently from Quilpy and Kingaroy following expansion.

“We understand the survivability advantages of Bos indicus content,” Cameron says. “But survivability alone doesn’t pay the bills. For us, fertility is non-negotiable.”

It is here that Cameron believes the Shorthorn female sets herself apart.

“From a production point of view, the Shorthorn has the best ability to consistently produce a calf year on year,” he says. “That fertility underpins everything else. Without it, nothing stacks up commercially.”

Importantly, all females are joined to Shorthorn bulls, reinforcing consistency in the genetic direction of the herd. The operation is predominantly self-replacing, further reinforcing the need for cows that last and perform.

Fertility as a Commercial Driver

At Weemabah Pty Ltd, the breeding objective begins and ends with reproduction. While growth, carcass traits and temperament all have their place, they remain secondary to a cows ability to conceive and raise a calf every year.

“At the heart of the success of any breeding business is fertility,” he says. “The expression of every other trait depends on having a calf on the ground.”

While Bos-indicus influenced cattle bring recognised survivability advantages, Cameron notes that those

Continued next page



From page 12

genetics can prioritise survival over reproduction in tough seasons. He is also quick to acknowledge however that Shorthorns are not a 'set and forget' solution. Selection pressures remain constant, particularly in an environment where seasonal variability can quickly expose weaknesses.

"We're very mindful that if you chase too much growth or size, you put pressure back on the cow," he explains. "The Shorthorn gives us fertility, milking ability and strong mothering, but only if we respect the environment and select accordingly."

That balance is central to the program, with this awareness driving bull selection. Genetics are sourced exclusively from Futurity Shorthorns through a combination of both private purchases and annual sale selection. The emphasis remains on fertility, moderation and structural integrity, ensuring cattle handle the demands of the country.

"There's no room for passengers," Cameron says. "A cow has to earn her place."

Market Flexibility Adds Commercial Strength

While production drives profitability, market access protects it. Weemabah Pty Ltd's turn-off strategy reflects this, with cattle sold through southern Queensland saleyards or cosigned into southern states via AuctionsPlus, with the split determined by market demand, seasonal conditions and pricing signals.

As sellers of weaner cattle, flexibility is essential. The Shorthorn influence provides progeny that can flow into

multiple supply chains, from feedlot programs servicing domestic supermarkets through to European and Japanese export boxed beef markets.

"The Shorthorn gives us marketability," Cameron says. "That British breed content opens doors, and that matters when you're making selling decisions year to year."

Buyer confidence remains strong in British breed content, especially for programs aimed at grain-fed and export markets. The flexibility to move cattle between different production pathways also helps reduce vulnerability to market fluctuations.

Commercial Validity Proven Over Time

For Weemabah Pty Ltd, Shorthorn genetics are not about nostalgia or tradition — they are about performance. The Shorthorn female's ability to conceive, calve, milk and rebreed under Mulga conditions has cemented her role within the business.

"In this country, you need cows that work with you, not against you," Cameron says. "The Shorthorn females do that. They're productive, adaptable and commercially relevant."

In an industry increasingly focused on efficiency and resilience, the Greigs' experience offers a clear message: when matched correctly to environment and managed with discipline, Shorthorn females remain a powerful commercial asset.

