

# More should be mince

## COUNTERPOINT

**John Carter**



SINCE the 1977 cattle price low, Australia's human population has grown from 14 to 23 million.

In roughly the same timeframe, beef production has fallen from 2,158,000 tonnes to 2,129,000t.

Domestic consumption has fallen from 986,000t to 739,000t (2011 figures). This is the equivalent of more than nine million people turning vegetarian.

Chest beating about our increased production efficiency also looks very hollow.

Despite expending \$2 billion of producer money across 36 years we are flying backwards. Our per capita consumption has crashed. We have it horribly wrong.

While European and US beef producers enjoy record prices, our current calf sales are bringing the lowest prices in real terms on record.

The supermarket duopoly with obscene mark-ups and the exporter dominance by the Brazilian government-backed JBS and the US-based Cargill don't help.

Australian Agricultural Company chairman Don McGauchie recently blamed its fortunes on Agriculture Minister Joe Ludwig's halting the live cattle trade.

He overlooked the earlier decision by the Indonesian government to become self-sufficient in beef and their weight restriction on boat cattle.

On the positive side he talked of the company's proposed hot boning abattoir in Darwin.

Its production should all go to

grinding meat and, if there is enough fat, be converted to frozen patties.

In the US, more than 50 per cent of production goes into mince.

Australia's production, if graded in the US, would see at least 80pc going into mince – here we mince less than 50pc.

Under the Meat Standards Australia (MSA) cuts-based system we try selling beef for grilling and roasting that is only suited to mince or sausages.

We now have 2.4 million of our 7-8 million carcasses deemed MSA.

At the height of the gold/purple brand era in 1991 where only milk and two-tooth cattle with a minimum fat depth were eligible, we only had 0.8 million branded.

A grading system gives different stars, rosettes or brands for different grades. MSA doesn't.

The way we are going we will end up putting MSA on everything in a suicidal farce.

We must treat most of our product like the rest of the world – they mince it.

Marbling in this year's Royal Agricultural Society of NSW (RAS) steer competition reached a new low.

Only one of 250 carcasses would have graded US Choice – the reliable table beef under the US system. These were our show steers!

The RAS does great work, but its continued insistence on only five per cent of the carcass points going to marbling is disastrous.

Millions of domestic consumers have already left beef for chicken.

Beef must compete with hamburgers, sausages, pies, meatballs, rissoles, beef bolognaise, beef risotto, beef ravioli, etcetera.

The 2000-year-old parable of the prodigal son and the fatted calf still hasn't sunk into our leaderless rabble.

We must join the rest of the world and mince our beef.