

## Straight Furrow - March 2013

Hammered by drought? The 2013 drought is shaping up to be one of the worst and most widespread droughts in recent history, with some saying it hasn't been this dry since the early 1940's. The severe feed and water shortages are hurting a great many farmers around the country with no promise of a reprieve any time soon.

While the most hard hit farmers are already selling stock and buying in supplementary feed to get through the next few months, what can we do to help protect ourselves from this situation in the future? Mother Nature doesn't always bless us with a great growing season before a drought and there are areas that will experience drought conditions year upon year.

One way to help ease the pain of future drought is to include drought tolerant cattle in our management plans. The use of FE and worm tolerant rams is popular and necessary in many areas so why not drought tolerant bulls? They are available throughout the country at reasonable prices. Santa Gertrudis bulls sold at auction in 2012 fetched an average price of \$3200 with a top price of \$5000.



Santa Gertrudis cattle are one of the largest breeds in Australia and were originally developed in Texas as a breed that can tolerate drought conditions while still producing good quantity and quality beef. They are excellent feed converters and will continue to maintain and even gain weight on poor quality pasture associated with prolonged dry periods.

'Santas' have very few production problems. This is largely due to constant maintenance and improvement of the breed through a classification process. All animals included in the studbook are individually assessed by specifically trained Field Directors to ensure structural soundness and breed quality. For any animal that does not meet the standard, neither that animal or its progeny will be included. This standard ensures that the breed characteristics such as: fertility, easy calving, foraging ability, resistance to drought, bloat and ticks, longevity and a high yielding carcass are upheld.

There is an opportunity for New Zealand farmers to increase profits and limit production costs by including some Santa Gertrudis genetics in their cow herds. They cross well with most breeds, so for a small change in bull buying practices, significant value can be added to the herd for many years to come. In general, Santa bulls are very sound and long lived, with many stories of bulls still healthy and serving cows into their teenage years. This quality alone will save farmers on bull buying costs each year.

Santa bulls are also very useful terminal sires, particularly for use over heifers as the calves are born long and lean with small heads. They have excellent growth to weaning, then continue to grow well to finishing weights, taking fewer checks in harsh, dry conditions.

For more information on how to improve your herd's drought resilience, or for more information on the breed, you can visit [www.santagertrudisbreeders.co.nz](http://www.santagertrudisbreeders.co.nz) or phone the breed secretary on 06 372 7772 to find your nearest Santa Gertrudis breeder.