

## **Ease of calving the major priority.**

No one is more sold on the concept of using Red Devon bulls over heifers than John Jury of Wairarapa.

Mr Jury farms beef, and has done so "for many years", running a herd of 250 Hereford/Shorthorn breeding cows.

He favours the Hereford/Shorthorn combination, saying "we have been breeding them for so long we know them to be great cattle".

"But when we got into this heifer calving business a few years ago we had to look for an ease- of- calving option."

His interest in Red Devons began while experimenting with the embryo transfer of Sussex cattle. "I was impressed with the breed and it is quite similar to the Red Devon, so when I was travelling to Wanganui and saw some Devons in a paddock, I bought one."

The basic premise for his use of the Red Devon over Hereford/Shorthorn-cross yearling heifers is that they are easy calving.

"And the calves get on their feet as soon as they are born. Sometimes, heifers are not too pleased to have a calf, so they need to be pretty sturdy."

He says a heifer occasionally needs help to calve, but no more than is typical.

"Some years we don't need to help any, other years there are one or two, but generally putting a Red Devon bull over the heifers means calving is fairly straight-forward."

And Mr. Jury has had no problems with conception rates. Of the 40-50 heifers put to the bull each year, 92-93% conceive and ultimately land a healthy calf on the ground.

"The calves weigh 34-40kg. They are no smaller than any other calf but they are not gross, which is what you have to watch for when calving heifers."

To ensure the heifers don't grow so large that they cause calving difficulties, Mr Jury feeds the heifers hay twice daily in the month before calving. "That's so the calf doesn't get too big and, once born, they go on to autumn- sown pasture. The new pasture gives the heifers and the calves a kick start."

Mr Jury says the Red Devon-cross calves grow out equally as well as the other crossbreds.

"And each year I keep 50 or so weaner heifers as replacements. If the Red Devon-cross weaners measure up, I keep them, so now we have a fair smattering of first-cross Red Devon breeding cows through the herd."