



Sarah Hudson

# Chris beefs up his foreign policy

WHEN Chris Oswin gets on a plane to fly to the US, his itinerary never includes Disneyland or the Grand Canyon.

The only sightseeing Chris, the manager of Alpine Angus at Porepunkah in Victoria's North East, ever does is of Angus cattle.

Chris, who has worked on four cattle properties, has travelled to the US seven times in his career, as well as New Zealand, and makes frequent trips around Australia.

Just recently he popped across to Western Australia to buy this year's stud bull.

He said the travel was a privilege not all cattle studs had the opportunity to experience.

"It's not a normal practice, but it is an insurance policy, the more information you can build up of how animals are breeding, the better," said the 43-year-old.

"Usually when you buy semen you look at a number, a photo and their pedigree. When you see a bull in the flesh, how it moves, its progeny, its parents its strengths and weaknesses you get a better picture and can match that with what you're trying to achieve.

"It helps you make better breeding decisions."

Clearly those breeding decisions are paying off.

For 11 years Alpine Angus, owned by Jim and Clare Delany, has held an annual bull and female sale. On March 27 they will sell 60 bulls and 10 registered females at Rosewhite, following on the heels of the Myrtleford and Omeo cattle sales, where a large amount of their bulls' progeny are also sold.

Alpine Angus was established in 1998 on four properties totalling 465ha and now has a herd of 350 breeding cows. Every female receives artificial insemination or embryo transfer, with a bull added to



Keen to observe: Alpine Angus stud manager Chris Oswin (left) and owner Jim Delany on the property at Porepunkah, in Victoria's North East.

pick up the shortfall. About two-thirds of calving is in spring and a third in autumn, to spread out feed demand and to meet annual sale requirements. Chris said generally 100 stud and commercial bulls were sold a year. Steers are sold locally, while roughly 50 heifers are retained, with the rest exported to either Kazakhstan or China.

With all his travels, Chris has finessed his eye for what makes a good bull, focusing on structure and temperament.

The stud aims to produce

bulls and females from diverse genetic backgrounds, structurally sound, with good temperament, high fertility, moderate birth weight and high 400 and 600-day growth.

Females should calve easily, produce a calf year-in-year-out and rear calves irrespective of the seasonal conditions. Their bulls are backed with leading estimated breeding values.

Chris said the sheer size of the US herd meant that country had more genetics to offer, with his travels taking him to such farms as Sitz Angus in

Montana, North Dakota's Schaff Angus Valley and Nebraska's Connealy Angus.

"When you travel you get exposed to some of the leaders in the field and see how they operate some of the most successful studs," he said.

"Temperament is something I look closely at and the same with feet, but even then you have to compromise. You'll never find a high performance bull with the best structure or vice versa. It's all a balancing act."

Chris said the Alpine Angus

cow herd was "run tough", increasing selection pressure to promote fertility and durability. Being in the valleys at the base of Mt Buffalo, Mt Hotham and Falls Creek, pasture is predominantly rye grass, and they produce oat and silage for bulls, rationed over summer and in winter they have sorghum-based silage.

Before moving to the North East, Chris grew up on a Phillip Island farm, studied agricultural science at Melbourne University, worked for NSW's Trangie Agricultural Research

Centre, near Dubbo, and then cattle properties at Keith in South Australia and at Beveridge, on Melbourne's outskirts.

Chris said while he aimed to absorb as many aspects of the Angus industry around Australia and overseas as possible, it was not always easy to balance with the demands of managing a property.

"Most of the time you spend the month before you go working every day and you get back and you're catching up," he said.