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## Miniature Herefords a perfect fit for peri-urban and family markets

Herefords are experiencing a mini boom among peri-urban landholders, young cattle enthusiasts and the baby boomer generation.

2017 marks the 20th anniversary since the first live shipment and frozen genetics of Miniature Herefords, with the smaller frame and quiet temperament proving popular with those who find the size of conventional cattle daunting.

The minis trace their foundation to the US where R. Rust Largent Jr bucked the US fad of breeding cattle with extreme frame scores, and made the decision in 1970 to continue with the stocky, easy doing small Herefords.

His son Roy diversified into miniatures to cater for the rising popularity of small acreage farms.

The first true miniature Hereford was born in 1981, LS Real MT 3, with most modern cattle able to trace their lineage back to this bull.

World-wide interest quickly grew once the first private treaty sale of miniature Herefords was held in 1989.

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Caitlyn, Emily and Nathan Nixon with their Miniature Hereford heifers, Winswood Felicity, Rustic Ridge Amy and Boomer Creek Sheila.

They are about 30-50 per cent the size of traditional cattle, with conformation and breed characteristics being the same.



Caitlyn and Emily Nixon have enjoyed breaking in and showing their Miniature Hereford heifers.

The cattle are judged in a similar manner - good bone structure, depth, functionality, soundness and carcass quality - but must be frame score one or less at age three.

The primary difference - adult miniature cows cannot be taller than 119cm at the hip and a bull not taller than 124cm.

Stud breeders can belong to two national associations, the Australian Miniature Hereford Breeders Network or the Australian Miniature Hereford Cattle Association.

Australian Miniature Hereford Breeders Network president Julie Stott said registered cattle number around 300, with most herds ranging from a few head to 20-30.

"I see the primary focus of the miniatures being the hobby farmers and those living on small acreages."

## Miniature Herefords a perfect fit for peri-urban and family markets (cont. from page 48)

"It has been a bumpy ride with growth in the early years followed by a plateau, and national herd reduction during the drought," Ms Stott said.

But, numbers are rebuilding with a growing interest from peri-urban and small lot farmers, especially the baby boomer generation retiring onto acreage.

Poll genetics are favoured by the small lot farmers for ease of management

"We like to think of the cattle as Herefords with all the qualities of the regular cattle, they are just a miniature version," Mrs Stott said.

"Generally, mature cows are around 39 inches (97.5cm).

"They are popular with schools as the smaller cattle are easy to break in and handle."

Ms Stott, who was among the first to import frozen embryos from the US in 1997, said stud heifers generally sell for \$1500-\$2000 and bulls for \$2000-\$2500.

She said a lack of volume had restricted the miniature Herefords from supplying a boutique branded beef product.

The majority of cattle are bought and sold on-line with steers either retained as "lawn mowers" or sold into the physical auction market.

"I sell my steers at the Carcoar saleyards where they receive the same cents per kilogram as the regular Herefords but are obviously a lighter weight," Ms Stott said.

"Other people use mobile butchers to process their steers on-farm.

"Weaning weights of steers is around 150kg live."

To cater for buyers with little or no background in livestock production, the network provides a comprehensive information pack on cattle and pasture management.

Miniature Hereford owners Nathan and Mel Nixon are one out of the box as they have a background in broad acre mixed farming.

In the early 2000s, Nathan's family shored up to 9000 Merinos, cropped thousands of hectares and run commercial Herefords in the southern Riverina.

Drought changed their landscape and today Nathan and Mel live with their four children on a small acreage at Wagga Wagga, NSW.

Both Nathan and Mel had grown up with commercial Hereford herds and wanted their children to experience the same.

But, it was a steak dinner at a local pub which set them on the path of miniature cattle.

"The steak was massive and I just couldn't eat it all - I got to thinking not only was it a waste of money but also the animal's life," Nathan said.

"Consumers are so conscious of their health and portion



Emily Nixon, 11, is learning about cattle handling and husbandry through her family's involvement with Miniature Herefords.

Last year the couple took delivery of three spring 2015 drop registered heifers to found their Carrington Miniature Hereford stud.

They selected on structural correctness, frame score, calving ease, temperament, polledness and eye pigment.

Nathan said interest from other peri-urban landholders had been phenomenal with forward sales of seedstock.

"I see the primary focus of the miniatures being the hobby farmers and those living on small acreages."

The family plan to increase their herd and allow the children the opportunity to show their animals.

"These cattle are not a fad - they finish well on grass and the quiet temperament and smaller frame makes them ideal for children and older people to handle," Nathan said.

For more details on the Miniature Hereford visit [www.ambhn.com](http://www.ambhn.com)