

# Beating the **ticking clock**

**J**eanne Seifert and her husband Ian Stark are travelling on the fast-track – it might sound ambitious, but it's based on the realities of their vision for their beef business.

"We're both aged in our 50s, so we don't have the luxury of time to develop our business," Jeanne said.

"Two years ago, we realised we had a vision of where we wanted to go but didn't know how to get there – we needed direction for the most effective and time-efficient way to progress our enterprise."

They signed up for a 12-month Agri-Business Development Institute (ABDI) program supported by MLA Donor Company. It built on the MLA's Business EDGE program they completed four years ago.

"Business EDGE was life-changing for us; it gave us access to advisors who provided clear, specific and relevant advice," Jeanne said.

"It emphasised to us that although we were debt-free, we ran a marginally profitable enterprise on marginal land. So, we took a leap of faith and expanded the business.

"We bought 2,500ha of backgrounding/fattening country at Jandowae and although we're now in debt, we're profitable and have economy of scale."

After this, Jeanne felt their enterprise was operationally under control but she wanted to know more about the business side.

"In response to increasing demand for our genetics and our vision to expand, we felt a business mentor could provide valuable guidance and tools to help us safely and confidently onto the right and, importantly, the quickest pathway to success," she said.

The ABDI program threw up some tough questions for Jeanne and Ian, but provided a framework to move their business forward.

"The program helped us identify what we were both good at. While I enjoy collecting and analysing data, Ian didn't

## LESSONS LEARNED

- Begin with a clear vision of the end-goal in mind.
- If you keep doing what you've always been doing, you will keep getting the same result.
- Seek advice to learn from others, and ensure that what you change takes you in the right direction.
- You need to work on your business as much as in your business.
- About 10% of your customers generate about 90% of your income.

feel he could afford to spend time out of the paddock," Jeanne said.

"He now feels that he could and should spend valuable time in the office managing his areas of responsibility."

Jeanne said another light-bulb moment of the business development program was formalising their vision.

**"The ABDI program provided a framework to treat our enterprise like a business asset, and enabled a shift in our thinking towards a corporate governance and management structure which will support our expansion plans."**

Jeanne is understandably passionate about Belmont Reds – she is the daughter of Dr George Seifert (the geneticist in charge of developing the breed in the 1960s), the largest breeder of registered BREEDPLAN-recorded Belmont Reds in Australia, and president of the Belmont Australia Association.

Her industry vision is to grow the commercial profile of the breed, while on a personal level she and



Jeanne and Ian with Seifert Belmont Red yearling bulls at Wonga.

Ian aim to maximise the potential of their enterprise.


"As owner-operators, our lifestyle is intertwined with our business but we don't want to be slaves to it," she said.

Jeanne and Ian are enhancing operational efficiency and managing risk by:

- developing job descriptions for their one full-time and two part-time employees to give clarity about responsibilities and identify skills gaps



## SNAPSHOT:

**Jeanne Seifert and Ian Stark,** 'Seifert Belmont Reds', Crows Nest and Jandowae, Queensland 



**Area:**  
6,000ha


**Enterprise:**  
Seedstock producers of Belmont Red genetics

**Livestock:**  
1,100 breeders

**Pasture:**  
Crows Nest: spear grass  
Jandowae: improved pastures include Rhodes, buffel, bambatsi, Wynn cassia and seca stylos. Included is 280ha of leuceana and 320ha of cultivation.

**Soil:**  
Crows Nest: decomposed granite  
Jandowae: mix of brigalow, belah and box soils and some spotted gum ridges

**Rainfall:**  
650mm

 Jeanne Seifert  
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- instigating formal planning meetings to forecast operations and improve communication
- developing a better understanding of financial and business planning
- improving communication with all stakeholders including their bank and their customers
- looking for new ways to grow their business, such as satellite bull-breeding herds
- investing in expertise, including a business mentor, and soil and pasture advisors to improve land management.

"The strength of a year-long course is that it provides time to make permanent the changes to your own culture and mindset," Jeanne said.

"It's hard to measure the economic impact of this immediately, but we are confidently shaping our beef enterprise into a more profitable, resilient, sustainable and valuable asset." ■