



The Long Black

New Zealand Lowline Breeders Newsletter No.6 September 2026

Welcome to another calving season with your Lowlines, where the results of planned matings of either AB or bulls finally arrive. Even after 48 calving seasons I still find it exciting.

Because I can't catch them at 2 or more days old, I tag them as soon as they are born and weigh them for their birthweight as soon as they stand, then they are left to bond with Mum.

Being prepared with a sheltered paddock for them to calve on reduces stress a lot, so the main three things I do ahead is shut up the paddocks, supplement with Magnesium Chloride in the water trough and vaccinate the cows 2 -3 weeks ahead of calving to reduce scours in the calves. Yes, they can get scours on their mothers so it's something to watch for.

Sharing photos of your new creations is fun – they are such funny animals and it's the only time of their lives they can be described as athletic!

If you have any questions or problems there is always someone in this group with advice or answers, and keeping in contact with your local vet is always a good idea. They are very much a trouble-free breed, but nothing is 100% guaranteed when breeding cattle.

Enjoy your Lowlines!

Fiona Henschman, chairperson NZLB



This is edition 6 of the newsletter. Is it worthwhile? Do you find it interesting or informative? We've had little feedback on **The Long Black** and need to know what you think for it to continue. Please let our editor, Michelle, at michelle@ironcladstud.nz, know how you feel about it.

ALCA news

Elections are coming up for the parent Australian Lowline Cattle Association. The annual meeting is set for October 31 and all members will be able to participate online or in person in Australia. The venue is still to be announced.

Nominations have been opened for council positions. We currently have a Kiwi on the council in Gordon Guthrie, from the South Island, who was co-opted a few weeks ago when another councillor stood down through illness. Gordon is a past president and treasurer of ALCA, and his expertise is especially valuable on council. Kiwi input is good to have.

ALCA is also undergoing a constitution review, and before the AGM ALCA members will receive a draft of changes that aim to embed participation with updates to digital voting and involvement, recognising ALCA now has members around the world. These changes will be voted on at the AGM.

INTERVIEW:



In this edition our interview is with Matt and Tania Wilkinson, of Lowland Park Australian Lowlines at Rukuhia, near Cambridge.

Matt, tell us a bit about yourself. Who are you, your background, where do you farm?

I was a dairy farmer for around 30 years before changing to beef farming as we got older. We still wanted to retain the outdoor farming lifestyle and, particularly, to keep working with animals, but without

some of the demands that come with dairying. We farm at Rukuhia in the Waikato, where we now run our Australian Lowline breeding programme alongside cattle being grown out for beef.

How did you get started in Lowlines? How did you choose this breed? Our introduction to Lowlines was actually quite practical rather than something we had planned. Around 2014 we started using Lowline bulls over Jersey heifers to see whether they would provide an easy-calving beef option. They did – very successfully.

We had tried other beef breeds and certainly hadn't had the same experience with calving ease. That initially got our attention, but as we became more familiar with the cattle we began to see that there was much more potential in the breed than simply producing an easy-born calf. That eventually led us into breeding Australian Lowlines ourselves and developing the herd we have today.

How many do you have - male/female/age? We currently have roughly 20 breeding females and four breeding bulls, as well as calves and replacement animals coming through. Most of our young stock that aren't retained for breeding are grown out for beef. That is important to us because it means we get to see how the cattle actually perform beyond the breeding paddock.



What is your plan with your Lowlines? My longer-term goal is to gain greater acceptance of the Australian Lowline within the wider agricultural industry through proof of concept. I think that requires more than simply saying the breed is good. We need to be able to demonstrate it. That is why we run trials and collect performance information. We want to objectively assess things such as growth, mature size, carcass characteristics and efficiency, while continuing to pay close attention to fertility, temperament and structural soundness.

Coming from a commercial dairy background probably influences the way I look at cattle. I am interested in what an animal can actually do and whether that performance can be repeated. I believe Australian Lowlines have attributes that can be genuinely useful to

commercial agriculture, but if we want the wider industry to take the breed seriously, we need credible evidence to support that case.

So for me, the future isn't simply about breeding more Lowlines. It is about measuring them, testing them and demonstrating where they can add value to New Zealand agriculture.



Is being part of NZLB a help to your Lowline dreams? Yes. NZLB is the New Zealand promotional group of the Australian Lowline Cattle Association (ALCA), and I think it has an important role to play in bringing like-minded people together and keeping members engaged with the breed. I'm the member liaison for NZLB, so part of my role is co-ordinating and engaging with members.

We also hold an annual summer field day centred around the animals, which gives

breeders the opportunity to get together, look at cattle, exchange ideas and learn from one another. For a relatively small breed community, that interaction is particularly valuable. It isn't just about promoting cattle; it is about sharing knowledge and creating an active group of people who are interested in the future of the Australian Lowline in New Zealand.

Ultimately, I think a strong and engaged breeder community, combined with better performance information and practical demonstrations of what these cattle can do, will help give the breed greater credibility within New Zealand agriculture.



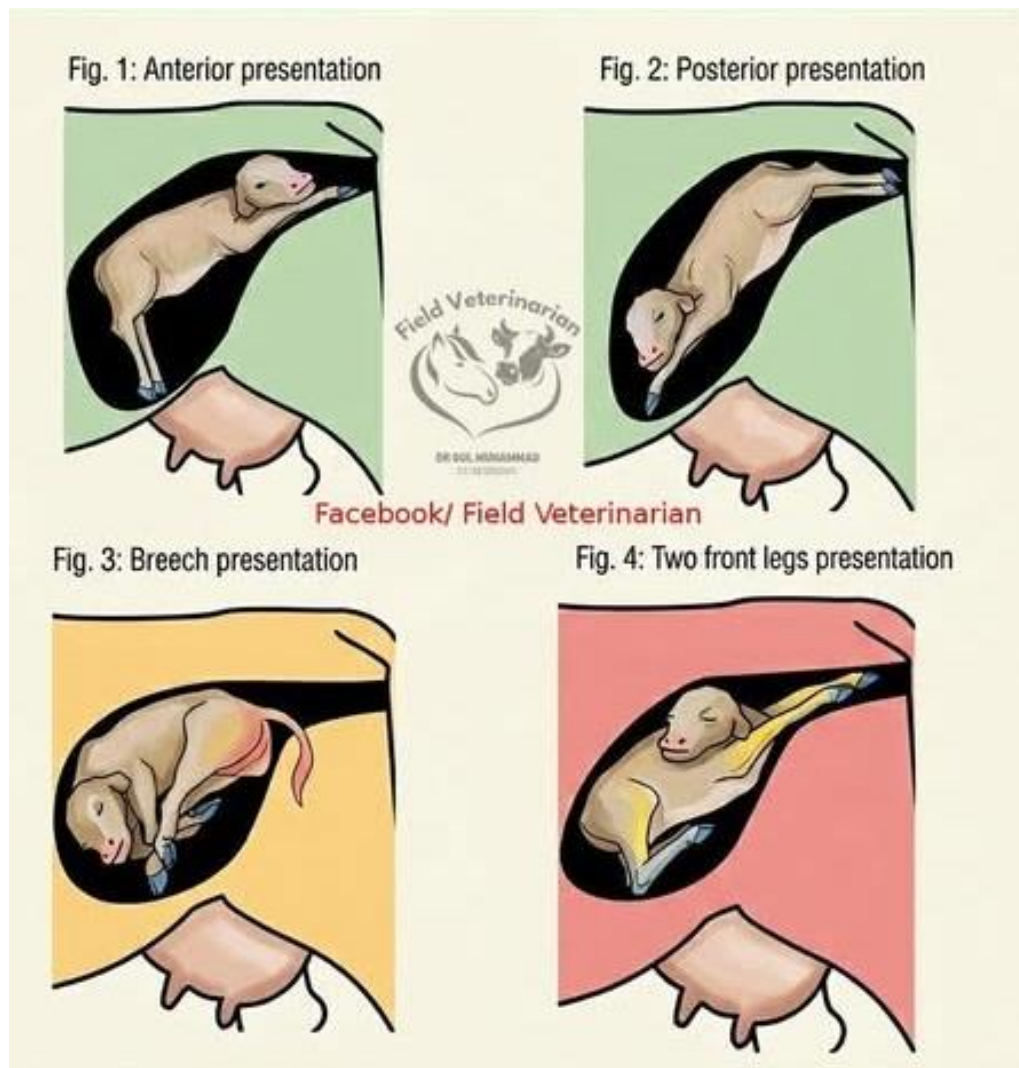
Fun facts about Tania you might not know: She loves chasing tornados – literally. She and son Andrew have been to the US on a tornado watchers' tour to photograph storms. Matt stayed at home, with his feet firmly on the ground.

When Tania is not taking photos, she's drawing and some of her amazing art can be found on her Facebook page, Tania's Art. She does take commissions, like this pup.

She shares her favourite recipe later in the newsletter. It is perfect to have after your favourite beef or steak meal. Matt and Tania both like their steak well done. Matt says you cannot ruin a Lowline steak no matter how it's cooked. It's still tender juicy and full of flavour.



Calving: what to look for



Normal Presentations

- **Anterior (Forward) Presentation:** The most common and ideal position. You see two front hooves and the nose (or feel the head between the legs), with the calf's back facing upward toward the cow's spine.
- **Posterior (Backward) Presentation:** The calf comes tail and rear hooves first. This is considered a variation of normal, but it requires quick delivery once the hooves appear so the calf does not suffocate before its head clears. You can tell it is a back leg by checking that the two joints closest to the hoof bend in the same direction (unlike front legs, which bend in opposite directions).

Abnormal Presentations (Requires Intervention)

Any presentation other than head-first or back-legs-first is abnormal and usually needs help from a farmer or veterinarian:

- **Breech Presentation:** The calf is backwards with its rear legs tucked forward under its body, meaning only the tail is visible in the birth canal.

- **Head Deviations:** The calf is coming forward, but its head is turned back against its side or down between its front legs.
- **Leg Flexion (Retained Limbs):** One or both front or back legs are turned back at the knee or hock instead of extended straight out.

When to call a vet

- You feel a abnormal position like a breech or head-back posture and cannot easily correct it.
- The cow has been actively straining for more than 30 minutes with no progress.
- You see a water bag or feet for more than 2 hours without the cow starting active labour or seeing further progress.

BIRTH WEIGHT & CALVING EASE

University studies in Wyoming and data from Montana and Colorado lend credence to the following conclusions:

1. The birth weight itself influences calving ease by 65%.
2. The female has 60-70% influence on birth weight of her calf.
3. The bull has 30-40% influence on birth weight of his progeny.
4. Pelvic measurement and angle as well as the shape of the calf have 35-40% influence on calving ease.
5. Length of gestation greatly affects birth weight. A fetus can gain over one pound per day in the last days of gestation.
6. Weather and temperature the last 30 days affect the length of gestation.
7. Size and maturity of the cow influence calving ease.

Most commercial producers do not take birth weights. Guessing is as inaccurate as driving with a broken speedometer – what's thought to be 55 mph may in fact be 65 or 70 mph, and what's thought to be 70-80 lb. may actually be 80-90 lb.

Remember, everything is relevant. Increased growth, frame and performance will increase BW. A longer-bodied calf will weight more. If a calf is expected to have genetics for growth, it will display this prior to birth as well as after. As a rule of thumb, it takes a calf weighing 85 lb. at birth to finish at 1200-1250 lb. A cow should easily give birth to a calf weighing 8% of her own body weight. Thus a 1200 lb. cow should give birth to a 96 lb. calf with ease.

Continued selection for light birth weights will ultimately reduce the mature sizes and performance of your cattle.

This is from an American cattle web discussion group, hence the weights in pounds – 85lbs is 38kg; 1200lbs is 544kg; 8% of 450kg is 36kg. These calculations and studies were done on bigger breeds than Lowlines. Interesting data and conclusion as calving ease is a big plus factor for Lowline bulls across other breeds.

Why Trans-Tasman Lowline Genetics Are Key to the Future of New Zealand bred Lowlines

The importance of breeder responsibility safeguarding productivity, health, and pedigree depth in the NZ herd of Australian Lowline Cattle.

The Legacy of the ALCA Closed Herd Book

The Australian Lowline breed is a remarkable success story of modern agricultural science. Developed from a completely closed, premium Aberdeen Angus research herd established in 1974 at the Trangie Agricultural Research Centre in New South Wales, the breed was systematically selected for superior feed conversion, exceptional carcase yield, and a compact frame. Because every animal must be DNA-verified directly back to this original foundation stock to maintain its purebred status with the Australian Lowline Cattle Association, the global gene pool is entirely finite.

While New Zealand breeders have built an exceptional national herd since its introduction in the late 1990s, geographic isolation creates a natural bottleneck. Unlike larger commercial breeds, we cannot simply 'breed up' using outside genetics. Left unchecked, a small regional population breeding strictly within its own borders faces a creeping rise in its inbreeding coefficient—a silent threat that slowly erodes the very traits we love most about Lowlines.

Understanding Inbreeding Depression

Inbreeding depression does not always show up as dramatic deformities; instead, it whispers before it shouts. For a breed prized for its compact nature, the most common trap is confusing true, structurally sound line-breeding with genetic stagnation. Over generations, a lack of new bloodlines leads to three distinct paddock challenges:

- **Loss of Structural Correctness and Stature:** Rather than maintaining a blocky, heavily muscled, deep-bodied frame, inbred animals often become unthrifty 'poor doers.' They lose their natural feed efficiency, structural symmetry, and the robust beef capacity that defines the breed.
- **Declining Reproductive Efficiency:** Fertility is highly sensitive to genetic stagnation. This manifests as irregular cycling in heifers, lower first-service conception rates, completely sterile bulls and reduced herd longevity in others.
- **Reduced Calf Vigour:** Healthy Lowline calves are famously hardy, typically hitting the ground at a safe, active 18–31 kg. Inbreeding depression leads to weaker calves with lower birth weights, compromised immune responses, and a distinct lack of early paddock 'thriftness.'

Introducing new Genetics from Australia

The solution to unlocking internal breed vigour lies in collaborative breeding and utilizing the deeper genetic reservoirs across the Tasman. Modern Artificial Insemination (AI) makes it simple to introduce entirely unrelated Australian sub-lines, providing an immediate boost to immune health, growth performance, and maternal instinct without losing breed purity.

Successfully pairing these pedigrees requires deep generational knowledge. For New Zealand breeders looking to diversify, collaborating with seasoned Australian exporters who understand how specific lines interact is invaluable:

Jeanette Stebbins (Ardrossan Lowlines Stud, Victoria)

As foundation members since 1992 and life members of the breed association, Jeanette and Peter Stebbins are internationally acclaimed for exporting elite genetics that have shaped herds worldwide. Jeanette's profound grasp of maternal lines ensures that imported genetics deliver structurally sound feet, highly functional udders, and exceptional grass-fed finishing ability.

Christine McIntosh (McIntosh Creek Lowlines, Queensland)

Celebrating over 15 years of breeding excellence, Christine is a premier specialist in both elite black and rare red Lowline genetics. Exporting globally since 2016, Christine's deep evaluation of pedigree depth allows breeders to introduce length, soft muscling, and docility while keeping inbreeding coefficients exceptionally low.

Breeding takes work!

Maximising genetic diversity is not a critique of our current stock, but an investment in their legacy. By strategically combining New Zealand's excellent pasture management with targeted, imported Australian straws, we can break the geographic bottleneck.

Looking across the Tasman allows us to secure a vibrant, highly fertile, and profitable future for Australian Lowline cattle in New Zealand.

Written by Matt Wilkinson, of Lowland Park Lowlines. Contact Matt directly for a sires catalogue of Australian genetics semen options.

Recipe: Tania's Oat and Apple Crunch

Tania's favourite: Simple, old-fashioned apple crunch, particularly good served warm with vanilla ice cream. Prep 12 mins. Cook 30 mins. Serves 4.

You'll need

- 4-5 medium cooking apples, peeled, cored and thinly sliced
- 5 tbsp brown sugar
- 5 tbsp white sugar
- 1/2 cup plain flour
- 3/4 cup quick-cooking rolled oats
- 125 g butter, melted
- 1/2 cup water
- Whipped cream or vanilla ice cream, to serve
- Optional: 1/2 tsp ground cinnamon + 1/4 tsp ground nutmeg

Easy method:

1. Heat oven to 190 C. Butter a 20 x 5 cm baking dish and spread the sliced apples evenly over the bottom.
2. Make the crunch. Mix the brown sugar, white sugar, flour and rolled oats together. If using cinnamon and nutmeg, add them now. Stir in the melted butter.
3. Assemble. Spread the oat mixture evenly over the apples, then pour the 1/2 cup of water evenly over the top.
4. Bake uncovered for about 30 minutes, or until the apples are tender and the topping is golden.

Calf recording:

It's that time of year again – the splatter of tiny hooves in the mud (or if you live in parts of North Canterbury the dust. It's been a dry, frosty winter here.). Calving time ... so Matt W has provided a guide to recording your calf with ALCA.

Lowline Calf Recording 101

Practical help for NZ members of ALCA

Understanding the rules of the Australian Lowline Cattle Association (ALCA) can feel overwhelming if you are new to breeding. However, keeping your herd's paperwork in order is simpler than it seems. The most important rule to learn right away is the difference between **Calf Recording** and **Full Registration**.

By using calf recording, you protect your herd's unique genetic value and help save the shrinking New Zealand Lowline gene pool—all without rushing into expensive, permanent decisions.

Calf Recording vs Full Registration

You do not need to fully register every calf the moment it is born. Instead, ALCA provides a two-step system that lets you delay major registration costs forever if you choose.

Feature	Step 1: Calf Recording (The Safety Net)	Step 2: Full Registration (The Upgrade)
What it is	A simple log entry on the ALCA database showing a calf was born to registered parents.	Upgrading that calf-recorded animal so its future calves can also be registered.
DNA Rule	No DNA typing or parent verification is required at this stage.	Requires submitting tail hair or SNP samples for DNA profiling and parent verification.
When to do it	While the calf is still young. It acts as an affordable placeholder.	Only later in life if keeping the animal for breeding, or selling it as certified seedstock.
Timeframe	Can stay in this temporary log system forever.	Optional upgrade to fully registered completed only when needed.

Help preserve the Lowline breed here in NZ

Because Lowline cattle started from a small, closed group of prize animals at the Trangie Research Centre in 1974, their genetic pool is very concentrated. Every time a Kiwi breeder lets a calf go undocumented, those genetics are permanently lost. This issue is called **genetic wastage**.

- **You lock the genetic door:** If you sell an unrecorded heifer to a lifestyle block, and five years later you realize her bloodline has completely died out everywhere else, you cannot simply register her. If she was never calf-recorded at birth, her unique genetics are locked out of the breed history forever.
- **You create genetic bottlenecks:** When breeders fail to record their calves, the database loses track of rare mother lines. Breeders then end up using the same few popular, highly visible bulls. This creates a dangerous bottleneck that reduces herd health and fertility over time.
- **You lose asset value:** An unrecorded purebred Lowline is viewed by the market as just a commercial crossbred. Recording a calf preserves its genetic identity, allowing you or a future owner to fully register the animal at any point down the road.

A Dummies' Guide to the Paperwork

You do not need to be a tech expert to record your calves. Just follow these basic steps:

1. **Tag Your Calf:** Give your calf its official farm ear tag. Your Animal ID will look like your 3-letter Stud Prefix + the Year Letter + a 3-digit number (e.g., XYZ W002).
2. **Write Down the Basics:** Note the birth date, sex, colour, the ALCA number of the dam (mother), and the ALCA number of the sire (father).
3. **Submit the Form:** Fill out the simple ALCA registration form, clearly note recording only, and email it directly to the registrar at registrar@genetichub.com.au

Article researched and published by Matt Wilkinson, Lowland Park Beef, New Zealand



Cute calves, bouncing baby bovines:

Send us your photos for the next newsletter.

We might even come up with a prize for the best.

Email to Michelle at michelle@ironcladstud.nz

