

Scotts embracing resilience

SCOTTS ANGUS ADVERTISER CONTENT

RESILIENCE is a recurring theme that runs through the 150 years of the Gage and Scott families farming west of Henty in southern NSW.

It began seven generations ago when Scottish and Welsh-born David and Jane Gage, along with their son William and his wife Euphemia, settled the area.

Catherine Gage was just a babe-in-arms when her parents and grandparents travelled by horse and dray into the Munyabla district in 1875, where they were the first selectors in the area and selected adjacent blocks of 259 hectares each.

The property Munyabla is the same parcel of land on which their descendants, the current generation of Scotts, live today.

The families battled bushfires, drought, and market

fluctuations to set the foundation for what today is a 2385-hectare cattle enterprise run by their fourth-great-grandson, Steven, and his wife Cindy.

Along with their children, Casey, Joely, and Sam - the seventh generation of the family - they sell 200 Angus bulls a year with a focus firmly on the resilience needed for today's challenge: climate change.

In 1906, Catherine Gage married Tasmanian William John Scott (WJ), and it was their son Bob and his wife Mavis who started the Glen Elgin Angus stud in 1956, which would go on to become Scotts Angus.

Bob and Mavis' son Jeff and his wife Allison (Steven's parents) continued the operation and, even though they are retired to Henty, still work on the farm every week.

"You like to have an idea



(Back) Joely, Sam, Allison, Cindy, Jeff, (front) Steven and Casey Scott, Scotts Angus, Henty. Picture supplied

of where you've come from and the challenges faced and what life was like in those times," Steven Scott said.

William Gage was the first farmer in the area to crop his land, but had to clear most of it for cultivation.

The Gages' farms were burned out twice by lightning strikes, and both times

had to rebuild everything.

Commitment to keep on going has been shown more than once over the century and a half.

"WJ Scott was a strong man," Steven said.

"The story goes that after unloading his bags of wheat at the Henty silos in the early 1900s, WJ lifted a grain wag-

on and using his shoulder to rest it on, removed the wheel and greased the axle, before heading for home."

Service to the community has also been important to all generations of the Scott family.

It was WJ Scott who, as president of the Railway League, played a prominent role in the establishment of the Henty to Rand railway line.

He also donated four hectares for the establishment of the Munyabla grain silo which still stands on a corner of the property.

"We've been here nearly as long as anyone in our area, so there have been all sorts of community involvement, whether it be show societies, sporting clubs, P&C committees, bush fire brigades or Landcare work," Steven said.

Resilience in family life has also been a theme.

Each of the partners to marry into the family has come from afar, with Mavis (Steven's grandmother) moving from Wauchope, northern NSW; his mother Allison shifting interstate from an Angus stud in western Victoria; and Cindy, his own wife, coming from South Africa.

"It would have been challenging for them to marry from outside the area," Steven said.

"They had to be resilient as well."

The current conditions will also be diarised as a time of testing, even with a smattering of rain about.

"The bare ground has turned from a shade of brown to a shade of green," Steven said.

"There is no real grass; it's just chlorophyll."

"It'll be a very tough winter."

The sesquicentennial year of sustainability

RESILIENCE may have been vital to bring Scotts Angus through to 2025 but a commitment to sustainability will take it forward.

Knowing the importance of maintaining groundcover to protect the soil, the Scotts traditionally used perennial phalaris-based pastures but now include summer-active perennials such as lucerne and sub-tropical digit grass to respond to climate variability. The immense pressure to clear the land in the very early days of Steven's forebears is being reversed with the Scotts' extensive revegetation plan. They are planting up areas with native species with an aim to cover 10 per cent of the property (they currently sit at about 8pc coverage) in the form of native tree corridors.

This brings healthier eco-

systems and enhanced wildlife habitats back to the farm with several species not seen for decades now spotted regularly (including wombats and echidnas). Their work has formed part of research at Melbourne University and Australian National University examining the economic benefits of the projects. Steven Scott said they don't consider the land to be locked up and out of action, but rather repurposed. The shade and shelter provided by the 30-metre-wide tree corridors reduce evaporation and wind speed, resulting in measurable benefits such as increases in ground cover, grass growth, comfort and ultimately, added weight gains.

"You get a great sense of satisfaction when you are watching these tree yards



A page from The Land, February, 1961 highlighting the innovation of Bob Scott. Picture supplied

get bigger and wider and understanding the role they play and the benefits they provide," he said.

INNOVATION GOES ON

Revegetation is an extension of the innovation mindset of the Scott forebears.

Decades of feeding innovation have stood them in good stead for current climate challenges.

Bob Scott devised a way to increase efficiencies in the use of silage. This involved the manufacture of a hydraulic two-tooth silage ripper,

which attached to the back of his Chamberlain Champion tractor to speed up the retrieval and distribution of silage.

"In successful farm management, it is no use being short-sighted. Look for the long-term benefits," Bob Scott said in a 1961 article from *The Land* newspaper.

"We've continued to put a lot of silage underground in past years, maximising the good times to protect ourselves from the bad times."

Jeff and Allison were early adopters in the area of supplementary feeding in the 1970s.

"They set up a feedlot and fed a lot of the steers and excess heifers that we had and gained quite a good reputation and following of local butchers at the local Wodonga saleyards," Steven said.

THE NEXT 150 YEARS?

To ponder what the next 150 years might bring for the Scott family requires reflection on the past.

"If you'd have asked David Gage that question in 1875, I don't think he would have come up with things like genomic testing, and he might have baulked at the idea of feeding out seaweed to produce low-emitting cattle," Steven said.

But adaptation has been key to the Gage Scotts' longevity in agriculture.

"In our genetics, we actively select for resilience traits like fertility, fast-growing, and easy calving, to breed the type of cattle needed for the future," Steven said.

"We will always make sustainability central to everything we do," Steven said.

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