



Rural

Billion dollar wagyu plan for Pilbara

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[Wagyu in northern Australia has not been produced on a large scale before.](#) (ABC Rural: Richard Hudson)

WSingaporean businessman Bruce Cheung believes wagyu beef production can transform agricultural development in northern Australia.

Mr Cheung, who operates Pardoo Station, 120 kilometres north east of Port Hedland, said wagyu could be a billion-dollar industry for the Pilbara.

"Like any start-ups, the road is not easy; wagyu up north has a lot of barriers because it hasn't been done in scale before," he said.

"But we want to overcome that barrier with the help of government and industry leaders.

"And I am quite sure together we can overcome all this to create a billion-dollar industry in the Pilbara."

Mr Cheung [purchased Pardoo in 2015](#) with the aim to increase its irrigated agriculture program and the size of its cattle herd.

Pardoo Station runs about 10,000 head of cattle, which consists of a mix of Angus and wagyu cattle, but the plan is to increase numbers up to 40,000 head within the next decade.

Wagyu is a high value Japanese breed of cattle with a marbled beef that can fetch up to \$500 a kilogram.

Mr Cheung thinks agricultural development in the Pilbara has been quite slow.

But he said the production of wagyu beef cattle on pastoral land could be a lucrative venture for many station operators, could create up to 900 jobs and the State Government appeared to support increased production.

Mr Cheung said a reliable water supply would also help him realise his billion-dollar dream.

"Pardoo happens to be one of two stations that sits on the last mile before Canning Basin enters into the Indian Ocean," he said.

"So we have access to huge amounts of water ... and we will try to develop a long-term industry out of it."

Water security for increased production

WA Department of Water and Environmental Regulation executive director of regulatory services Paul Brown said his department was currently mapping groundwater availability around the state.

He said Pardoo had applied to increase its water allocation, which was reliant on its own analysis of the effect of an increased allocation on the local environment.

"[Pardoo] has a staged approach and it has only applied for water at two stages, and they are talking to the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) about the third stage," he said.

Mr Brown said he could not comment on the specific details of Pardoo's water allocation application.

But he said most irrigated agricultural proposals were in the range of 10 to 30 gigalitres.

"Pardoo in its first two stages has gone over 10 billion litres in terms of entitlement," he said.

"So they must monitor [impacts] and we will review that with them periodically."

Help from wagyu gurus

Since taking over the operation of Pardoo, Mr Cheung has enlisted the help of leaders in wagyu breeding and genetics.

He has worked closely with Japanese wagyu breeding legend Shogo Takeda, Australian Wagyu Association president and Albany wagyu producer Peter Gilmour, and one of Australia's largest wagyu producers, Queensland pastoralist Peter Hughes.

Mr Takeda estimated that about 95 per cent of wagyu genetics in Australia originated on his farm.

He said Mr Cheung had a "wonderful" plan.



[Singaporean businessman Bruce Cheung runs Pardoo Station in the Pilbara, where he produces wagyu beef.](#) (ABC Rural: Richard Hudson)



[Master Japanese wagyu breeder Shogo Takeda checks out a West Australian wagyu herd in Wundowie.](#) (ABC Rural: Richard Hudson)

Mr Takeda said he did not think the plan for a billion-dollar wagyu industry in the Pilbara would flood the market.

He said increased production would bring the price down, which would be an overall positive for the industry.

"And that means that your average consumer will be able to enjoy better-tasting meat."

Industry development will take time

Mr Gilmour was the first person to start breeding wagyu cattle in Western Australia and has now been producing wagyu beef for more than a decade.

He believes Mr Cheung's plan is ambitious but attainable.

"I think [a billion-dollar industry] is possible, but I think it will take time."

Mr Gilmour estimated it would take five to seven years for Mr Cheung to start increasing production of wagyu beef in earnest.

But he said wagyu production was not for the faint-hearted.

"It's not the breed to jump into and think 'Gee, I could make a bit of money from this'," he said.

"You really need to play the long game and I think Bruce is certainly thinking that way."

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