

## The history of the Norfolk Blue Breed

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Norfolk Island was first established as a penal colony. First settlement was around 1790 and second settlement was between 1825 and 1855. The English brought many of the old United Kingdom bred cattle to the Island during both settlements. When the penal colonies closed down and 3<sup>rd</sup> settlement established with the arrival of the Pitcairners in 1856, all of the existing cattle were left on the Island for the Pitcairners.

The Island herd was very much a closed herd because of the Island's isolation. During the mid-1900's a local by the name of Gilly Bailey arranged to have a "blue" bull transported to the Island. As far as we are aware, that was the first new genetics to arrive on the Island. There are no records to determine where the "Blue Bull" came from, other than to say that because of the shipping routes at the time, it would have come from either Australia or New Zealand.

The Norfolk Island locals have a tradition of issuing nicknames and the "Blue Bull" was quickly named "Dr Blue Suit".

Again there are no records to determine the exact breed of the "Dr Blue Suit", but the strong belief is that he was an Angus/Shorthorn cross which is known to throw blue. That is also supported by the characteristics of his progeny.

In those days there were few fences or cattle grids, so "Dr Blue Suit" quickly became the Island's stud bull.

In 2001 Robyn Menghetti (then Robyn Murdoch) arrived on the Island to take the position of CEO for the Norfolk Island Administration. Robyn (with a background in agriculture) was immediately taken by the varying characteristics of the "blue" cattle roaming the Island.

In 2003 Robyn married Paul Menghetti. Paul ran a mixed herd of mainly white faced baldies on 100 Acre Farm and after finishing her time with the Administration, Robyn set about purchasing all of the Island's blue cattle from the many and varied owners; all of whom thought she was mad. Even her husband thought the project was odd, but supported what he thought was a "silly" notion.

There was only one blue bull on the Island at the time which was purchased from Bubby Evans along with around 13 cows/heifers to add to the few others that had been purchased. That blue bull became critical to the future development of the herd and was fondly referred to as "Mr Bull". Only one local refused to sell the only other remaining blue cow. So all the blue cattle were amassed on 100 Acre Farm.

To Robyn, the "blues" appeared resilient and very much acclimatised to the Island conditions and there was something very special about, what she felt, was a uniquely "Norfolk Island" breed. They were very attractive in appearance, mid-sized and well-tempered.

Seeking support and advice off Island from geneticists and others, a breeding program commenced in 2005; the first bred "Norfolk Blue" was born on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2006 (ME130).

From advice received, it was apparent that given the small herd size, new genetics had to be introduced but without compromising this special breed. It was recommended that any new genetics be introduced slowly, using the rules of separation for line breeding but to stick with the origins of the original Dr Blue Suit; viz Angus/Shorthorn cross.

The Australian Cattle Breeders Association pointed Robyn to the BlueE breed being developed in Woodstock (near Cowra, NSW) by Jonathon Wright. Jon had been breeding Angus/Shorthorn crosses for a long time.

In 2006 a bull calf was born (the progeny of Mr Bull) and developed as a breeding bull (Baby Bull) but it was time to consider introducing outside genetics. (Baby Bull mysteriously died on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2013).

Consequently, through a collaborative arrangement with Jonathon, the first AI program was undertaken in 2011 which proved to be highly successful and produced another bull calf which could be developed as a breeding bull (Boof Head).

Managing the genetics carefully, the herd was growing and developing.

A second AI program was undertaken in 2012 and again another suitable bull calf was born to be developed as a breeding bull (Bubby). Ironically, Bubby was born on 30<sup>th</sup> July 2013, just 5 days after the mysterious death of Baby Bull! Currently, Bubby is our main working bull.

In 2010 the Menghetti's opened a restaurant (Norfolk Blue Restaurant, Grill & Bar) and in 2013, a café (The Blue Bull) purposely to showcase the special eating qualities of the Norfolk Blue beef which by this time, had become apparent. This provided an outlet to enable an accelerated breeding program. The restaurant held No 1 position as the Island's top fine dining restaurant until its closure in 2016. In 2017 the café was also closed.

As a result of the closure of the restaurant and café, the herd size needed to be reduced and therefore the breeding program has been temporarily suspended until 2019 when a further AI program will be undertaken utilising genetics from BlueE in Australia.

Today, the Norfolk Blue breed is still significant on the Island and supplied to customers through the local supermarket or via direct request to the breeders, particularly from visiting tourists.

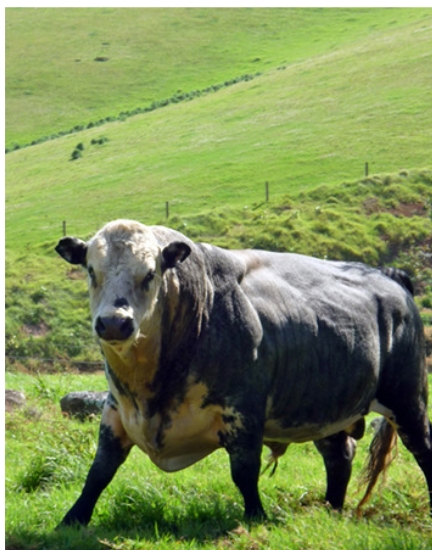
In the coming years the Menghettis believe they will be in a position to formally register the breed.

ABC Landline featured Norfolk Blue. The link to that story follows:

<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/programs/landline/old-site/content/2012/s3566014.htm>

A Youtube segment was also developed by Norfolk Island Tourism. That link also follows:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xoWLZeMS8do&sns=fb>



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