

## **The purchase of 150 Brahmans from Kidman Springs Research Station in the...**

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THE purchase of 150 Brahmans from Kidman Springs Research Station in the Northern Territory, all pregnancy-tested-in-calf or with calf at foot, is about to significantly ramp up the beef production ability of Cambodian families who have earned their calf through the Cows for Cambodia program.

"Those genetics will be our best gift of all," founder Andrew Costello said.

"They are expected to settle into the environment well and, coming from a Northern Territory government facility, they have been handled a lot so are perfect for the job.

"The much larger frame and ability to produce a calf that will grow faster will be a big improvement to Cambodia's beef production."

Mining magnate turned beef producer Gina Rinehart has also come to the party, providing feed and agistment free of charge at Hancock Prospecting's Phoenix Park, Katherine, during the preparation stage for the cattle.

Cosi said the families the charity works with can only afford to eat beef once or twice a year themselves, at special events.

"They produce for the upper end of the Cambodian market and owning a cow is the equivalent of Australians owning a house," he said.

"Not one of the families has opted to cash out when their heifer calf arrived - they've all kept and raised her to breed from every year, so we really are having a big impact on breaking the cycle of poverty."

Fertility has been a big challenge.

"First, the family has to identify when the cow is on heat, then walk her to the local bull and pay US\$10 to mate her," Cosi explained.

"The bull only serves her once so needless to say, given all that, the low fertility rates nearly buried the charity in the start.

"We tried pre-purchasing matings but when we went back we found the bull owners had sold the bull!"

So Cows for Cambodia put funds it had raised into building a set of yards and buying its own bull and created a system where cows spend two months with the bull.

That has resulted in an 80 per cent improvement in fertility.

Within five years, the plan is to have a 1000 head herd, which means the need for donations will be far less.