

## Chapter 3

# Beef and dairy products

Cattle were better able to take care of themselves in the bush than sheep and featured prominently in the early stages of the great land rush. They tended to be pushed out of the best wool growing areas later on, but a surprising number of wool growers still kept them on as a sideline. Land that proved unsuitable for Merinos became cattle country by default.

The first successful shipment of frozen beef to Britain in 1879–80 raised high hopes for exports, but they did not develop to any significant extent for another 70 years. This was primarily because Australian beef was of lower eating quality than that of its chief competitors. Two major changes resolved this issue in the 1950s: the hamburger trade made a virtue out of the former deficiencies of the product, and there were major improvements in the feeding of Australian beef cattle.

Australian dairying did not make much progress until it was transformed by factory methods and mechanical refrigeration in the closing decades of the 19th century. Dairy farming then helped to sustain closer settlement in the higher-rainfall parts of Australia and butter was a more successful export than beef right through to WWII. Yet the dairy industry was in serious trouble by the War and had to be restructured afterwards. Despite their earlier problems, both beef and dairying finished the 20th century on a positive note. Australia had become the world's biggest beef exporter and its revitalised dairy industry was one of the success stories of the 1990s.

This chapter follows the pattern of the first two chapters in relating the early development of the Australian cattle industries to what was happening in Britain and Ireland at the same time.

## What Britain and Ireland contributed

The most important things that Britain and Ireland contributed during the formative years of the Australian cattle industries were: 1, a strong preference for beef and dairy products; 2, some cattle farming practices; 3, the improved breeds that were used to upgrade the founding herds; 4, the diseases that came with those cattle; and 5, the technologies used for preserving meat and for processing dairy products. The history of the United Kingdom's beef and dairy imports is also covered, though Australia did not participate till later.

### Food preferences

British and Irish eating habits at the time of settlement reflected a strong liking for beef, butter and cheese. For example, the beef consumption of England and Wales in 1800 may have