A helping hand for cows in the heat

Lucy Webb-Wilson from DataGene introduced the world-first Heat Tolerance ABV to delegates at the Northern Australian Dairy Conference. Picture courtesy Queensland Country Life Newspaper.

Dairy farmers can now breed for greater heat tolerance in their herds, using a world-leading Australian Breeding Value (ABV) for heat tolerance, released by DataGene in December.

Lucy Webb-Wilson, DataGene extension officer, presented a sneak preview of the Heat Tolerance ABV to delegates at the recent Northern Australian Dairy Conference at Gatton.

"Australian dairy farmers are familiar with the impact of hot, humid weather on their herds. Now they can add breeding to their toolbox of ways to help cows handle the heat," Lucy said.

She explained that although environment and management conditions had a big impact on a cow's response to the heat, genetics also played a role.

"Advances in genomics allowed the Dairy Bio team to identify gene markers for heat tolerance. The Heat Tolerance ABV allows farmers to identify animals with greater ability to tolerate hot weather with less impact on production," she said. Dairy Bio is a joint initiative between the Victorian Government and Dairy Australia.

To breed for improved heat tolerance, look for bulls with a high Balanced Performance Index (BPI) and a Heat Tolerance ABV of greater than 100. Use a team of bulls to allow for the lower reliability.

The reliability of the Heat Tolerance ABV is 38% which is in line with the newer generation of genomic-only traits. Like all new ABVs, reliability is expected to improve with time, as more data becomes available.

Heat tolerance is favourably linked with fertility and unfavourably with production. This means a strong focus on heat tolerance bulls may improve fertility but compromise production.

"If breeding for heat tolerance, look for the exceptional animals that are strong for both BPI and heat tolerance," she said.

While not all dairy farmers will want to include heat tolerance in their breeding priorities, some are keen to get started.


Heat Tolerance ABV

Fact Sheet: A helping hand for cows in the heat

The Heat Tolerance ABV was developed with funding from the Australian Department of Agriculture and Water Resources.

Now when I get a list of bulls I'm going to be looking for bulls which combine increased production and increased heat tolerance – they are going to be the ones who buck the trend."

Trevor's family milks 160-240 cows year round and sells bulls to semen companies and other dairy farmers.

Trevor Parrish, Kangaroo Valley, NSW.

Having a Heat Tolerance ABV will mean we can breed cows with a greater ability to tolerate hot weather, be better suited to our farming environment. We will be looking for the bulls that pull together production and heat tolerance."

Ray's family milks 400 cows year round and sells bulls to semen companies and other dairy farmers.

Ray Kitchen Carenda Holsteins, Boyanup, WA

Heat Tolerance is something we can breed in our cows for free so why not? Like all genetic traits, it will be permanent and cumulative."

Shane manages a 250-cow herd for the Lorebeck Partnership. He is looking forward to being able to breed cows better suited to his farming environment using the new Heat Tolerance Australian Breeding Value (ABV).

Shane Gardiner, Lorebeck Partnership Mt Gambier SA

DataGene
Solutions for Herd Development

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Managing bobby calf welfare

Care of calves is a high priority for the dairy industry. Animal welfare requirements apply to all calves born on farm, whether they are destined for the milking herd, reared elsewhere for beef, or marketed as bobby calves.

Refer to the Rearing Healthy Calves manual for information on industry agreed calf management practices.

A bobby calf is:

- Less than 30 days old.
- Weighs less than 80kg live weight.
- Is usually a dairy breed or cross.
- Is sold for meat or reared for dairy-beef.

Around 400,000 bobby calves are processed each year in Australia supporting local jobs and providing a valuable protein resource.

The dairy industry is working with calf buyers and transporters, saleyard agents and abattoir workers to ensure that everyone involved in the management, transportation, handling and marketing of bobby calves understands their responsibilities to protect calf health and welfare and meets the agreed standards.

The dairy industry is investing the welfare of bobby calves through:

- Training via the National Centre for Dairy Education (NCDE), to ensure farmers are aware of their responsibilities for the rearing and housing of all calves and guaranteeing fitness for sale.
- A joint project with processors and saleyards to train people that manage and handle bobby calves.
- A bobby calf traceability trial to verify whole-of-supply-chain responsibility for bobby calves.

More information Calf management across the supply chain

This report summarises significant achievements in addressing two principal issues of critical importance to the dairy industry and the wider community. They are:

- Everybody understands the calf supply chain commitment to responsible handling and care of calves.
- The calf supply chain maintains an excellent reputation for production of veal that meets required food industry standards.

For more information, visit the Dairy Australia website www.dairyaustralia.com.au