

Breeding focus delivers in spades for Tasmanian family

Dairy farmer: Stuart and Kylie Nailer

Region: Tasmania

Topic: BPI

A trial of sexed semen three years ago ignited one Tasmanian dairy farming family's passion for breeding and laid a foundation for the business's future.

Stuart and Kylie Nailer milk 215 cows at Ringarooma, in Tasmania's north-east, with their children – Sophie, 14, Kaiden, 13, McKenzie, 11 and Oaklea, 8. They moved from Queensland six years ago, initially buying the farm in partnership with Stuart's parents.

Since 2014 the herd has recorded a 425% rise in Balanced Performance Index (BPI), a measure of the traits that contribute to profitable dairy businesses. It now sits at about \$105.

The sexed semen result provided a boost for the family in what was otherwise a tough year with the farmgate milk price cut and drought.

"That year we did the experiment with the sexed semen, it was a really good result," Stuart said.

"We had 25 heifers and got 60% in calf. We were stoked."

From this joining, the couple decided to focus on breeding Holsteins rather than the Jersey-Holstein and three-way way cross which they had been breeding.

Stuart and Kylie both believe there's more opportunity for gains with Holsteins and have made the most of tools such as genomics and corrective mating in recent years.

They ramped-up their use of sexed semen across both heifers and cows and this coming year plan to sell no bobby calves. Instead, they will use sexed semen to breed replacements and an Angus mop-up to provide calves for the local F1-market.



Since 2014 Stuart and Kylie Nailer have increased their herd's Balanced Performance Index (BPI) by 425% rise with it now sitting at about \$105.



Last year, they joined with two sexed semen sires; one delivered a 72% in-calf-rate and the other 55%.

Using sexed semen for the first time wasn't the Nailers' first foray into changing breeding at their farm. The couple's first priority – when they took over the property – was to tighten the seasonal calving. It was initially spread across four months and they now have it back to August and September.

“We had to take a whack to tighten it,” Stuart said.

“We had an empty rate of about 20% for two years, but then it tightened-up. That was when we woke up to the fact we needed higher fertility bulls and bulls with high daughter fertility. Then we got some really good results.”

Stuart and Kylie use the Good Bulls App to make breeding decisions. Calving ease and daughter fertility are paramount and they look for sires with a reliability of at least 70%. BPI has also been a focus. Stuart said the Good Bulls App made decision-making easier, by narrowing-down bulls which suit their breeding focus.

“We don't get caught-up in the nice pictures (of bulls) or anything like that,” he said.

Genomic testing has started to play a larger role in the Nailers' decision-making.

“We now have numbers to play with and hope to eliminate the bottom 20% (through genomic testing) by culling early and before we spend money on them for rearing,” Stuart said.

They would like to sell these calves to local farmers as replacements putting the income towards paying for genomic testing.

The Nailers currently service a local market for F1 calves and hope to continue this to make the most out of every animal on farm.

“Our goals are to maximise (the value of) every calf that's born,” Stuart said.

“Our attitude would be that if we have a good 60 replacement heifers, they are the ones that get sexed semen and the best cows. Everything else gets – if possible, F1 beef sires to maximise the calf value. That's our ultimate goal in the back of our minds for two-to-three years' time.”



Kylie and Stuart's goals are to maximise (the value of) every calf that is born.

Changes have also been made across the entire farming system. Ten per cent of the farm undergoes pasture renovation each season, initially planted out for a summer crop and then back into perennial ryegrass. This crop – which includes pasja and millet this year – provides feed for the warmer months on top of 60 ha of irrigation.

The farm is about 82 ha, with some agistment.

The herd is fed about 1.8 tonne/cow/lactation in the bail. Production has lifted from a herd total of 75,000 kilogram of milk solids three years ago, to 96,000 kg MS last year and the herd is on-track for 105,000 kg MS this season. During this time the total herd has increased by 30 cows but production per cow has lifted 40 kg MS. Average production is now 500 kg MS/cow and the cow's weight about 550 kg.

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