DataGene
Solutions for Herd Development

Data delivers for Brookbora breeding

Dairy farmer: Bacon family

Region: Northern Victoria

Topic: DataVat

Information underpins breeding decisions at the Bacon family farm in northern Victoria.

The Jersey breeders have reams of data about their family's Brookbora herd and that's exactly the way they like it.

"We are overloaded on data," Sandra Bacon explained.

"We use it for breeding. We have production data – because we herd test every month – we record all our health records, including our treatments and we have activity collars recording the rumination and each cow's activity that assists with the management of hot days, that sort of thing. We also have genomic information and all the animal's histories. We record as much as we can regarding the herd."

Now Sandra and her family, including husband Robert, son Daniel and his fiancée Stacey Leppert, have started using an industry web portal to combine their information and generate reports about their herd.

DataVat was created by DataGene as a central data repository for the dairy industry and provides farmers with easy access to their own data and a way to research Australian Breeding Values (ABVs).

The Bacons milk 260 Jerseys at Tennyson, calving in autumn and spring.

> *"We look up the Good Bulls App selection criteria for bulls and then narrow it down to the bulls of interest and then we look up DataVat for more detail on dam and sire ABVs."*
>
> **Sandra Bacon, Northern Victoria, 260 Jerseys**

Sandra Bacon uses DataVat to access information about cows in all the one place.

Their herd is also part of dairy industry's Ginfo Project. This means their data contributes towards Australia's national reference herd for genomic information.

Sandra said DataVat was one of many tools they use for breeding.

"We use the Good Bulls App to narrow down our bull selection and then look up DataVat for more detail on dam and sire ABVs.

"On the female side, we download their full data and we use it for breeding including their strengths and weaknesses. We use that together with what we know of the cow from day to day, for breeding. It is good to get all the information in one place."

The Bacons select a team of bulls to use at joining but individually mate cows to give each animal the best opportunity to improve. They select sires that score highly for specific individual traits.

Classifications and pedigrees are also considered as part of the breeding strategy.

Milking registered Jerseys underpins the family's passion for dairy. Their goal is to breed a healthy and profitable herd, while striving for continuous improvement.
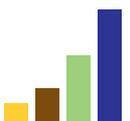
"Breeding of the cows is ultra-important for us," Sandra said. "During the drought, we'd say 'if we didn't have the herd that we worked so long on, it would be easier to get out'. It was the cows that kept us going when things got tough."

Last year the Brookbora herd produced slightly less than 1.5 kg of milk solids per kilogram of liveweight, averaging 7,567 litres/cow/lactation, 286 kg/cow/lactation of protein and 367 kg/cow/lactation of milkfat.

DataVat helps the Bacons combine various forms of herd information, including genomic data from several different sources, such as former industry programs and private companies.

"With DataVat we can access the information from all those animals in the one place," Sandra said. "That's made it a lot easier, we are not trying to get some from here and some from there. DataVat also has all of our older animals, so we can go way back to day dot and look at it in one source."

Examining their herd, Sandra said she found DataVat easy to scan while searching their active cows' specific details.

The Bacons have genomically tested their entire milking herd and all their young stock, excluding the fresh calves.

Increasing the proportion of genomically tested animals at Brookbora Jerseys has been a priority in recent years to build the herd's dataset.

This data boost and DataVat has enabled them to quantify trends in cow families, which they had suspected, after more than 55 years of breeding registered Jerseys.

"It has shown lines that you just shouldn't breed from," Sandra said. "It's also shown lines that it wouldn't matter what you breed to them, they will do well. Their maternal line is strong."

The Bacons use data to improve on-farm decision making, but they also get satisfaction from contributing to the Jersey breed.

"If we can make (genomic data) more reliable then we also get back something," Sandra said.

"Jerseys are also efficient cows and we need to continue to get that out there."

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