

Genomic ‘believability’ on show in Queensland herd

Daley family

Region: Queensland

Topic: Genomic testing

Milking genomically tested heifers has helped debunk any lingering doubts Colin Daley had about the breeding science.

The Queensland dairy farmer started genomic testing his 200-250 cow registered Holstein herd a few years ago with encouragement from his son Owen.

At the time, genomics was emerging as a tool to help farmers use their animals’ DNA to better understand their individual breeding and performance prospects.

Colin and his wife Shelley started genomically testing calves in batches, monitoring the animals’ development and then matching it with their genomic results.

While they are only milking a small number of genomically tested cows and heifers, the results have been clear.

“They are living up to their genomics,” Colin said. “We are getting the believability in these results when the animals are coming through. It gives us the confidence to do some more and be able to make more use of genomics in the future.”

The Daleys operate Ourway Holsteins at Millaa Millaa on the Atherton Tablelands, producing an average of 6000 litres/cow/lactation.

Colin said they previously pushed milk production up to 8000 litres/cow/lactation, but high feed costs meant it was more profitable to feed and produce less.

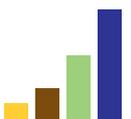
It is crucial business decisions like this that could be guided by genomics into the future.

For example, genomics can provide insight into how individual animals score on the Feed Saved Australian Breeding Value (ABV), painting a picture of their ability to convert feed to milk production.

Colin said there were early indications that this was a trait which could be improved in his herd, and he would also closely examine their Heat Tolerance ABVs.



Colin Daley says his herd is “living up to their genomics”.



“I’m getting more confidence in the reliability of it all and I think genomics is doing a decent job of identifying the better animals,” he said.

“To be able to identify the mastitis resistance, fertility, and likeability at a month of age, it is pretty incredible stuff. I have no doubt in the future that it will play a role in our breeding programs.”

The Daleys have also recently started using DataGene’s DataVat web tool to access their herd data and reports to assist them with breeding selections.

Breeding practices are changing

Targeted use of sexed semen combined with beef dominates the breeding program at Ourway Holsteins. It’s something Colin never envisaged for his business.

“It is very different farming here to what it was 10 years ago,” he said.

“If you had told me 10 years ago we’d be mating 30% of the cows to beef, I would have said ‘rubbish, we are stud Holstein breeders’.

“But the reality is, we can’t utilise all our heifers ourselves and we don’t participate in the export opportunities, plus we are so far away, the only way we can sell heifers to others is to have a local sale.”

One cattle market is set to grow again in Queensland – demand for herd bulls is increasing.

Ourway Holsteins sells up to three herd bulls to local farmers each year. Now, under Holstein Australia rules, these bulls must be genomically tested.

“I support the policy. To register a Holstein bull now, it has to have a genomic test,” Colin said. “We test anyway, but I think it is a good idea, for a number of reasons. If the bull is a dud, you don’t want to be using it anyway, but if it’s an absolute outlier – one that’s outstanding – you never know what might happen with it. Genomically testing bulls for registration is a good policy.”

While Colin and Shelley’s son Owen is now farming in NSW on his partner Brie Bratfield’s family dairy, Colin said their youngest son Nathan, 12, was also very keen on the cattle.



Colin believes genomically testing bulls for registration is a good policy.

It’s this next generation which will benefit from decisions made now and Colin said that was what made genomics so important.

“We have to use the scientific tools that are available to us, it doesn’t matter if soil or pasture species or cattle selection,” he said. “The science is there to help us, if we don’t accept the science, we are going backwards.”

CONTACT US ABN: 78 613 579 614

DataGene Limited, AgriBio, 5 Ring Road,
La Trobe University, Bundoora Victoria 3083



email: enquiries@datagene.com.au



www.datagene.com.au



T (03) 9032 7191



Disclaimer: DataGene is an independent and industry-owned organisation responsible for driving genetic gain and herd improvement in the Australian dairy industry and is an initiative of Dairy Australia and industry. This report is published for your information only. It is published with due care and attention to accuracy, but DataGene accepts no liability, if, for any reason, the information is inaccurate, incomplete or out of date whether negligent or otherwise. Copyright © DataGene Ltd. All Rights Reserved.

June 2021

