

Illawambra animals in high demand

Parrish family

Region: New South Wales

Topic: Genomic testing

The Parrish family's cows and bulls have always been in demand but this year they've skyrocketed to a new level. They have four bulls in Genetics Australia's 2021 progeny test team and have sold 88 cows to other farmers so far this year.

It's hardly a case of overnight success for the Kangaroo Valley, NSW, farmers. Their herd has been in the top 10 for Balanced Performance Index (BPI) for more years than Trevor Parrish can remember.

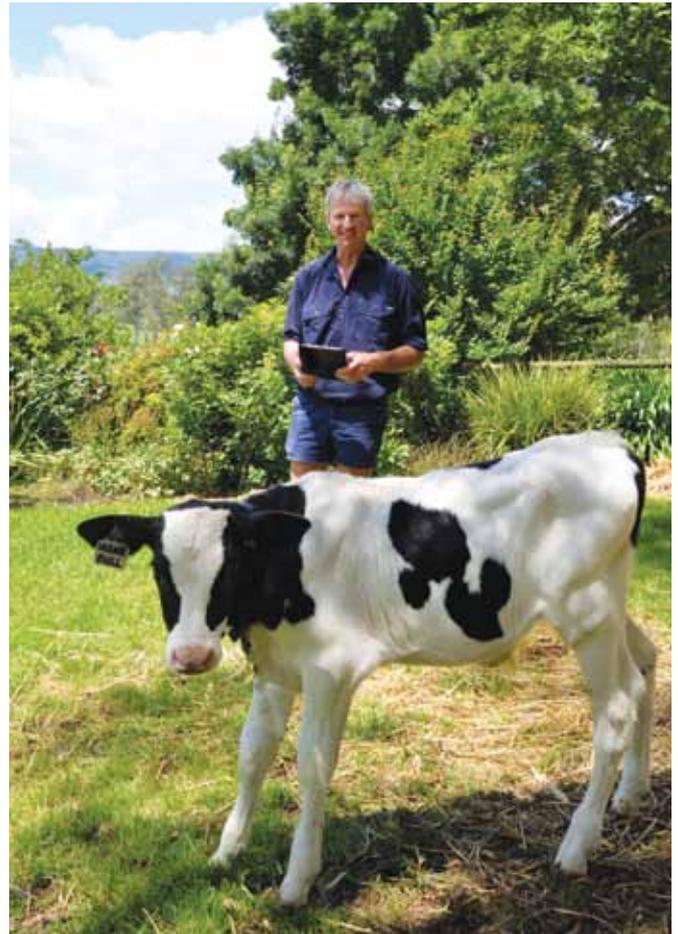
He puts it down to getting in early when new technology comes on the market and maintaining a strong focus on having a healthy and profitable herd.

The fourth-generation farmer's Illawambra prefix was established in 1990, though the family's stud history dates back to 1947.

The four bulls in the GA progeny test team include Shoalhaven, Optics, Merlya and Kikuyu. In the August 2021 ABV release all four ranked in the top 1% of the breed for BPI and Health Weighted Index (HWI) with Shoalhaven, Optics and Meryla also ranking in the top 1% for Daughter Fertility. Kikuyu and Meryla are the best of the three for Mastitis Resistance ABV, placing them in the top 1% for this trait. The increasing emphasis on health and management traits is the reason why the bulls rate so high on BPI and HWI and careful bull selection and the adoption of genomics has seen the significant increase of these traits in the Holstein bulls available in Australia.

Trevor's herd calves year-round, averaging about 200 in the milking herd, peaking at 260. "As numbers build up, we sell milking cows to other farmers; 88 to four different farmers since Christmas," Trevor said.

"People ask for milking cows so we select from the freshest calved bottom BPI animals in the herd and sell



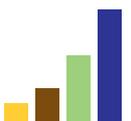
Trevor Parrish began using genomics very early.

them. We used to sell on type but have found using BPI for selection is easier. We have sold a number of cows that have scored well and the farmers are happy."

The herd consistently ranks among Australia's best and Trevor is confident that it's getting better every year. After the August ABV release the herd ranked number one Holstein herd for BPI and number two for HWI.

He attributes much of that success to genomics and a willingness to try new things.

"We embraced genomics very early," Trevor said. "There was a calf born the other day that is sixth generation genomically tested.



“I saw where it could lead. Parent verification was a big thing and once you put the bulls into the system, you can pick up if there’s something wrong.”

“When things come out, I grab a hold of them early on. Some people are slow adopters, some people are sceptics. I adopt things early and find out if it’s going to work for me or not and I think that has put me ahead of the game.”

Trevor admits that before genomics, there were times when he didn’t get it right.

“If there were a few calves born in the night, I’d look at the colours and think that’s the right calf for the cow, but when we started genomically testing, we picked up that I wasn’t always right.

“I believed the science straight away.”

Trevor has been able to use these facts to breed improvements, such as milking speed and daughter fertility, with profitability the focus.

“It’s more about profitable cattle for me. I like good looking cows but not if I have to AI them five times. The high BPI

cows prove to me you can have good looking cows and good type, they are the profitable animals.”

In bulls, demand is strong for A2, polled and red carriers, but Trevor says it all boils down to profitability and he’s pleased that his bulls have been able to attract good money in recent times.

They are members of Nucleus Group at Genetics Australia, which pays for 20 of the herd’s females and all the bulls to be genomically tested each year. Trevor hopes the stud’s popularity in Australia can extend overseas as all females are tested for BPI, TPI and LPI along with A2 through Holstein.

“It’s a world market; we’ve got cattle here from families in America and it should be a two-way street if we can get them there,” he said.

“I think there is a market there – it gives you something to strive for. You always want to be moving forward.”

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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



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