

Records crucial to fertility gains in Gippsland

Dairy farmer: Janet and Rob Auchterlonie

Region: South Gippsland, Victoria

Topic: Ginfo

When it comes to fertility or joining, you'd be hard-pressed to find a record Janet Auchterlonie hasn't kept.

"We keep all sorts of records on joining, from who inseminated each cow – to establish the conception rates on different inseminators – to the timing of insemination," the Dumbalk dairy farmer explained.

Fertility is vital for Janet and her husband Rob, who milk 250 crossbred cows as part of a seasonal calving operation in South Gippsland.

On top of these joining records, the couple also herd records six times a year.

It's due to these precise records that the Auchterlonie's herd was selected to be part of DataGene's Ginfo program,

the dairy industry's reference database for genetic information.

"We keep meticulous records and have a good six-week in-calf rate of 75%, there's a connection there I believe," Janet said.

"Since I have been keeping meticulous records our knowledge has improved. Also, through Ginfo we are learning about lameness scoring. Within 24 hours of herd recording we lameness-score every cow in the herd and send in the results. Ginfo is improving my record keeping and my ability as a manager. We are assessing the big picture, what is happening to our herd."

The evolving breeding philosophy

Seven years ago, Janet took-over the responsibility for selecting bulls. Previously, they had Holsteins with some Red and Jersey-crosses. Now the herd's comprised of 16 per cent Holstein with the rest crossbreds. The crossbreeding started to gain hybrid vigour. Now half of



When it comes to fertility or joining, you'd be hard-pressed to find a record Janet Auchterlonie hasn't kept.

Photograph: Marian Macdonald, Stock and Land



the herd are three-way-crosses with the rest a combination of two and four-way crosses.

“I use the *Good Bulls Guide* as my first port of call for the selection of Jerseys and Reds,” Janet said.

“It now has a crossbred section, which is great, and I will be using it in the future. I check-out the New Zealand, Scandinavian and Irish bulls that appear in the Holstein section. Mainly my Holstein section is picked from a short-list given to me by my herd improvement company adviser who understands my selection criteria. I then vet all the bulls.”

Janet’s breeding philosophy is focused on health, stature and daughter fertility. Short-gestation is a key as no cows are carried-over from one season to the next.

The cow size has decreased from 650kg to 550kg in liveweight and production averages about 1kg of milk solids per kilogram of bodyweight. Bought-in feed includes 1.5 tonne/cow/lactation of grain and hay. Silage is homegrown. The milking platform is 113 hectares.

The final step in Janet’s breeding process includes evaluating the bulls for daughter fertility.

Janet’s Genetic Progress Report tells a story of improvement.

All the Auctherlonies’ major genetic merit indicators are heading in the right direction – and not surprisingly – fertility in both the crossbred and Holstein herd has been way above the national average.

Only new to the Ginfo program, Janet wants to give back to the industry, while also learning more about breeding and the evolving breeding technologies.

“If data is collected from individual herds, all dairy farmers benefit,” she said. “The more dairy farmers involved in data collection, the better it is for the dairy industry in this country. If farmers are breeding better cows, it gives me more of a choice of what bulls to use for this herd.”

For now, Janet and Rob will continue to focus on their fertility metrics. Currently, their three-week in-calf rate is 60%, but their six-week in-calf rate is only 75%. It’s something they want to understand so they can improve it.



Fertility in both the crossbred and Holstein herd has been way above the national average. Photograph: Marian Macdonald, Stock and Land

Other breeding goals include maintaining the low mortality rate, preserve or improve production and enhance herd health. Replacements will continue to be bred from the best genetic merit animals but in future beef will be used to join the remainder of the herd.

All this would be achieved while maintaining a strict six-week dry period as part of their seasonal calving system.

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.