

Heat Tolerance ABV

Fact Sheet: A helping hand for cows in the heat

Highlights

- Dairy farmers can now add breeding to their tool box for helping cows handle the heat.
- The Heat Tolerance Australian Breeding Value (ABV) allows you to identify animals with greater ability to tolerate hot conditions and less impact on milk production.
- To breed for improved heat tolerance, look for high BPI bulls with a Heat Tolerance ABV of greater than 100. Use a team of bulls to allow for the lower reliability of the Heat Tolerance ABV.
- Update your Good Bulls App to include Heat Tolerance ABVs.

Australian dairy farmers are familiar with the impact of hot, humid weather on their herds. They use a variety of tools to cool cows during the summer. These include providing shade, fans, water sprinklers, extra drinking water and changing the timing of milking and feeding. Visit Dairy Australia's Cool Cows website for tools and resources.

Now dairy farmers can add breeding to their cool cows toolkit. The Heat Tolerance ABV allows you to breed animals with greater ability to tolerate hot conditions with less impact on milk production.

Genetics and heat tolerance

Although environment and management have a big impact on a cow's response to the heat, genetics also play a role.

Within a herd, some cows demonstrate an increased tolerance for hot and humid conditions than others. Genomic technologies (DNA testing) enable scientists to identify genetic markers for heat tolerance in these cows.

DataGene

DataGene is an independent and industry-owned organisation responsible for driving genetic gain and herd improvement in the Australian dairy industry.

DataGene's functions include genetic evaluation, herd testing and herd improvement software development, data systems and herd test standards.

DataGene is a Dairy Australia and industry collaboration.

More information

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The Heat Tolerance ABV is expressed as a percentage, with a base of 100.

An animal with a Heat Tolerance ABV of 105 is 5% more tolerant to hot, humid conditions than average. Its fall in production will be 5% less than average.

Reliability

The reliability of the Heat Tolerance ABV is 38% which is lower than conventional production traits but in line with the newer generation of genomic-only traits. Like all new ABVs, reliability is expected to improve with time. If placing a high priority on selecting for heat tolerance, allow for its lower reliability, by using a team of bulls.

Breeding for improved heat tolerance

To breed for improved heat tolerance, look bulls with the combination of a high Balanced Performance Index (BPI) and a Heat Tolerance ABV of greater than 100.

Heat tolerance is favourably linked with fertility and unfavourably with production. This means a strong focus on heat tolerance bulls may improve fertility but compromise production. Look for the exceptional animals that are strong for both BPI or production, and heat tolerance.

Make sure you update your Good Bulls App to include heat tolerance ABVs.

Acknowledgement

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