



Calving Ease ABV for Holsteins

Breeding for a simpler calving

Key points

- Improved calving ease has animal health and welfare benefits and cost savings for dairy businesses.
- Dairy farmers now have more Holstein bulls to choose from if they want to ensure their cows and heifers calve easier.
- The model used for the Calving Ease Australian Breeding Value (ABV) was updated in April 2020 to include genomics.
- This has the following benefits:
 - Young, genomic Holstein bulls now receive a Calving Ease ABV (previously only proven bulls)
 - Improved reliability.



To improve the Calving Ease from this mating, select bulls with a Calving Ease ABV of at least 103. If breeding replacements from this mating, use a Good Bull (high BPI).

Improving calving ease

The risks of calving difficulty can be reduced by good management, such as rearing well-grown heifers. Selection and breeding strategies can also reduce the incidence of calving difficulty in both the short and long term.

Joining a cow or heifer to a bull whose progeny are born more “easily” than the average, is a way to reduce calving difficulty and improve health and animal welfare. An easy calving also helps cows through a seamless transition into lactation.

Breeding for easier calvings

The Calving Ease Australian Breeding Value (ABV) reflects the ease at which a bull’s progeny is born. It isn’t a measure of how easily his daughters will calve. This means a bull’s Calving Ease ABV is most relevant for the calving outcome from a specific mating (rather than long term genetic gain).

Calving Ease ABV is expressed as a percentage of normal or easier calvings in mature cows. The higher the number, the easier the calving. The average is 100.

Bulls in the top 10% for calving ease have an ABV of 103 or more.

The Calving Ease ABV is not included in the Balanced Performance Index (BPI) or other Australian indices. The updated model for Calving Ease has no effect bull rankings.

What to do?

To improve the Calving Ease from this mating, select bulls with a Calving Ease ABV of at least 103. If breeding replacements from this mating, use a Good Bull (high BPI).



What does the updated ABV mean for farmers?

It’s easier than ever to select Holstein bulls for Calving Ease and dairy farmers have a larger choice of quality bulls which can reduce calving stress in their herd. There’s more choice and improved reliability giving farmers more confidence.

Updated model

Until April 2020, the Calving Ease ABV was based on pedigree data and calving ease scores supplied in reports from farmers. As this information isn't available until after a bull's daughters have calved, Calving Ease ABVs were only available for proven Holstein bulls.

The updated model introduced in April 2020, draws upon additional information including genomics and calf size. This improved reliability and enabled almost all Holstein bulls to receive a Calving Ease ABV, including young, genomically-tested bulls.

Reliability

Reliability is a measure of confidence in an ABV. The higher the reliability the greater the confidence.

With the updated model, the reliability of the Calving Ease ABV for a young, genomic bull is about 60%. This figure goes up to 90% for a bull with 100 calves born and recorded.

Calving reports

Calving reports provided by Australian dairy farmers contribute to the Calving Ease ABV. Farmers assess the level of difficulty associated with the birth of progeny from a bull. Farmers rate a birth from No Difficulty to High Difficulty, depending on the level of assistance or complications associated with the calving. Calving reports also include a score for the size of the calf which contributes to the Calving Ease ABV.

Other breeds

The Calving Ease ABV is only published for Holsteins. The Jersey breed has significantly fewer calving ease issues. There is not enough data available to calculate calving ease for other breeds at this stage.

Acknowledgment

The improvements to Calving Ease evaluations are the result of DairyBio research. DairyBio is a joint initiative between Agriculture Victoria, Dairy Australia and the Gardiner Dairy Foundation. We also thank farmers and software providers who supply data used in genetic evaluations.

More information

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