

# Farm records drive Simpson farm

IMPROVING HERDS

Linda and Andrew Whiting,  
Simpson, Western Victoria



## Genetics Case Study

Western Victorian dairy farmers, Linda and Andrew Whiting, have a long history of involvement in dairy industry genetics programs and a history of detailed farm records so it was no surprise when they were invited to be part of the ImProving Herds Project.

Over the years, the Whittings' 330-cow herd has been used in several industry research projects to develop and improve the accuracy of genomic selection.

"We've been on this farm for 17 years and have always kept detailed herd records on a computer; previously with PC Farm and more recently with Mistro Farm. I like keeping good records!" Linda said.

"We've been herd testing monthly for 20 years so we've always had a lot of information on individual cows."

The Whittings' herd was one of 27 dairy farms across Australia that recently underwent detailed analysis by the ImProving Herds project to investigate the contribution of genetics to dairy businesses.

The study identified the top and bottom 25% of each herd, ranked on Balanced Performance Index (BPI), the genetic index for profit used by the Australian dairy industry, and compared their performance in terms of production, longevity and financial contribution to the farm business.

Ten years of historical performance data, plus recent farm financial data from the herd records were analysed to look at the difference in contribution to the farm business between the top and bottom BPI groups.

### Farm stats (August 2018)

#### HERD SIZE

320 milkers

#### BREED

Majority Holstein

#### FARM SIZE

125 ha milking platform plus 125ha run-off block

#### CALVING PATTERN

Three times a year (February, May and September/October)

#### DAIRY

20-unit swing over

#### STAFF

Linda and Andrew

#### FEEDING SYSTEM

Basic in bail system average 2.5t/cow/year

#### HERD TESTING

Monthly for the past 20 years



*"A genomic profile adds value to the herd – if we were to sell cows to other dairy farmers then they would know exactly what they were getting."*

Linda Whiting, Simpson, Victoria



The study found the top 25% of the Whiting herd produced 483 more litres, 50 more kilograms of fat, and 36 more kilograms of protein per cow per year than the bottom 25% of the herd. The top 25% also last 6 months longer in the herd.

The extra milk production from the Whittings' top cows resulted in an extra \$330/cow/year in milk income after feed and herd costs compared with the bottom group.

The Whittings milk 320 cows, predominantly Holsteins, on 125 ha at Simpson in Western Victoria and keep their young stock on a separate 125 ha run off block.

Their herd is milked through a 20-unit swing over dairy and fed in the bail with cows consuming around 2.5 tonnes of grain each per year.

The herd has three distinct calving periods – in equal groups of 100-120 cows – in February, May and September/October.

The Whittings use advice from World Wide Sires when it comes to choosing sires for the herd to minimise inbreeding, avoid genetic faults and for pedigree advice.

“We’re mindful of BPI and health traits. When we are looking at bulls for our sire list we want them to be in the top 50 to 100 for BPI so we can move forward with the industry.

Emphasis is also placed on type, mastitis resistance and fertility as cows are generally culled from the herd for mastitis and failing to get in calf.

“We want good udders, capacity and feet. We look at production and want a balance between volume and components.

“We always look at the Good Bulls Guide when it comes to choosing sires. When we classify the cows, we look at their lowest points and then look for sires who can lift them in those traits,” Linda said.

“Our figures are improving all the time and are on an upward trend.”

The Whittings use a simple PG synchronisation system on the cows with conventional semen.

They aim to rear 90-100 heifer replacements a year and effectively replace a third of the mature cows of the herd each year.



## ImProving Herds pays dividends

IMPROVING  
HERDS

*ImProving Herds was a three-year project that studied the contribution of herd improvement to Australian dairy businesses.*

*At the heart of the project were 34 inspiring Focus Farmers who agreed to put their farm, herd and financial records under the spotlight. Seven were Herd Test Focus Farmers and 27 were Genetics Focus Farmers. This is one of a series of case studies about their experiences as ImProving Herds Focus Farmers.*

*ImProving Herds has shown that:*

- *The daughters of High Balanced Performance Index (BPI) bulls perform better under Australian conditions, across dairying regions and feeding systems.*
- *Cows in the top 25% for BPI in a herd outperform cows in the bottom 25% for production, fertility, longevity and contributed on average an extra \$300 income over feed and herd costs.*
- *The benefits of using genomic breeding values to guide heifer selection decisions were demonstrated on the Focus Farms, where the performance of genotyped heifers aligned with their genomic breeding values.*
- *Information from herd testing gave Focus Farmers confidence to make data-driven decisions for routine management and to respond to high pressure events.*

*Funded by the Gardiner Dairy Foundation, the project was a collaboration of Dairy Australia, Agriculture Victoria, DataGene, Holstein Australia and the National Herd Improvement Association of Australia (NHIA).*

ABOVE: The extra milk production from the Whittings' top cows resulted in an extra \$330/cow/year in milk income after feed and herd costs compared with the bottom group.

Replacement heifers are genomically tested as two-year-olds, although Linda may consider earlier genomic testing in the future.

"We've been genomic testing for more than eight years so have genomic results on every animal in the herd," Linda said.

"Having a genomic profile adds value to the herd – if we were to sell cows to other dairy farmers then they would know exactly what they were getting."

## CONTACT US

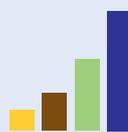
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