

Beefing up your Breedplan Recording

A quarterly newsletter for members of Shorthorn Breedplan – 1

*This newsletter will be issued to members of Shorthorn Breedplan on a quarterly basis to assist you to better understand and use performance recording. It will be accompanied by a series of **HOW to RECORD...** fact sheets, the first of which, **Birth Weight** accompany this issue – file them to keep as a reference.*

Why we need to measure up....

Selling bulls these days is all about demonstrating to the commercial breeder that your bulls can contribute to his herd's performance and profitability – and the days of “motherhood statements” to describe a bull's perceived potential are long gone.

The savvy commercial breeder wants to know a bull's credentials for a whole range growth, maternal reproductive and carcass traits. If you can't provide that information, they will look elsewhere - perhaps even to a competing breed !

A few points to consider about Breedplan....

(1) performance recording is not about saying which bull is best (leave that for the show judge) but rather, which bull best fits a breeder's production and marketing goals – by describing the bull's genetic profile for a number of traits.

(2) not all traits are of interest to every bull buyer, but given the diverse range of environments and markets that commercial breeders operate in, the stud breeder needs to provide as many trait profiles as he can if he is to satisfy the needs of the diverse range of prospective bull buyers.

(3) the highest EBVs are not necessarily the best. Commercial breeders are more interested in a balanced set of figures rather than extremes, and if the breed is making genetic progress for important production traits, EBVs on the right side of average will satisfy the needs of most commercial breeders.

(4) don't get carried away with small differences in trait value – a few kg either way won't really make a difference. Being in the top end is more important than being top!

(5) Breedplan doesn't calculate an EBV for common sense, or quite a few other economically important traits such as structural soundness, temperament, muscle score and maturity type – that's where you fine tune your selection.

(6) the savvy seedstock breeder needs to be performance recording his whole herd for the full menu of birth, growth, fertility, maternal and carcass traits **AND** be recording those traits with integrity and accuracy if he is to provide a useful array of EBVs and Selection Indexes to his clients, Compromise these standards and you may be providing inadequate or misleading information to your clients – a sure way to destroy a client's confidence in your bulls, and the breed.

Management groups – where a difference really makes a difference, and where size counts.

Most of the perceived problems with Breedplan are traced back to incorrect management-group recording. Get the management grouping right, and you're a long way towards improving the accuracy and usefulness of your EBVs

The basic premise of Breedplan is that it makes the **best estimate** of an animal's genetic merit **from the information available** – an honest and straight-forward statement. How good the estimate is depends on how good the information is.

Good information is good in both quantity and quality – quantity reflects the number of measurements available on the animal and its close relatives, and quality reflects how well those measurements have been taken with regards to accuracy of measurement, contemporary group size, selective reporting etc.

As the EBV calculation is based on the difference between the individual's performance and the group average - the bigger the group of animals being compared the better – but only if all the animals in the group have been treated similarly, otherwise the comparison will be biased.

Examples of getting it wrong include; feeding a few bulls in the group a bit extra to polish them up for a show, or splitting the group into separate paddocks that differ greatly in pasture history and treatment, or drenching some and not others, or castrating some male calves and leaving the rest entire.

These events will cause some animals to perform differently to their mates in the group – therefore the treated animals need to be compared as a separate group. Get that part wrong, and you have got the EBVs wrong !

Getting it right is sometimes a play-off between management group size and possible management group differences. You need to keep management groups as large as possible, so don't go overboard in splitting groups unless you are convinced that the different circumstances will influence the performance of some animals within the group. On the other hand, don't disregard management differences just to keep group size large – common sense needs to prevail.

A few tips to get your managements groups as meaningful as possible;

(1) keep the contemporary groups as large as possible. If you need to split a group, first do so on the basis of sex (bulls, steers, heifers), as Breedplan treats different sexes as different groups anyway. Next, weigh/measure all the animals in the group **before** you split it, even if it is a bit earlier than usual. The animals are then first compared as a single, large group, allowing valid across-group comparison after the split.

(2) record as a separate management group animals that have been treated differently to others in the group. If not sure, make a note alongside the animal's record when you submit it to Breedplan

(3) weigh/measure all the animals in the group on the same day. If you weigh the group over several days Breedplan will consider the group has been split, even if you don't.