

# DEVELOPING A BREEDING OBJECTIVE

AUGUST 2008



Australian  
Dairy Herd  
Improvement  
Scheme

## Investing in genetic improvement

**THE** investment you make in your herd's genetic improvement is permanent. No matter what the season brings, the genetic value of animal stays constant. A herd of high genetic merit animals contribute net profit to a farm business through more efficient production of milk solids over time.

Achieving genetic improvement requires you to make some choices about your

herd. What sort of cows do you require to improve the profitability of your business? The answer to this question will guide the development of your farm's breeding objective.

Genetic improvement takes time and a focused approach. A carefully considered breeding objective will stay current for several years.

## What is a breeding objective?

**THE** National breeding objective is reflected in the Australian Profit Ranking (APR). The APR is a selected group of traits carefully combined to reflect the economic drivers of net profitability for the range of dairy farming systems found in Australia. Production, survival, milking speed, temperament, cell

count, liveweight and fertility are the traits found in the National breeding objective.

Your farm's breeding objective may match the National breeding objective. Or, you may choose to add or remove traits from this list to suit your farm business.

**“Why should I bother with a breeding objective? I'd rather be doing something else.”**

**By building a profit-focused breeding objective, you will set yourself up to achieve genetic progress over the next five years. Make bull selection simpler by establishing your breeding objective now.**

# Step 1: Gather information to help you build your breeding objective

**BUILDING** a breeding objective begins with collecting information that could influence the type of animal you wish to breed. In the following diagram, you will find some ideas on the type of information that is useful when determining the list of traits of importance to your farm.

**Now it's your turn. Use the table below to list your important traits.**

Where to get the information	What to think about	List your important traits here
Herd test records and management records.	Identify your 'best cows'. What are the common characteristics of your best cows? List these traits.  For example, your best cows may be high protein producers with good milking speed and temperament.	For example: Faster milking speed
Management records Mating program reports Classification results	Do culling records indicate specific weaknesses in your herd? What are the top three reasons animals are culled?  If you have used a mating program, has it suggested specific weaknesses?  If you have classified animals, has your conformation analysis-herd summary indicated particular weaknesses?	
Where to get the information	What to think about	List your important traits here
Milk supply statements	What milk components are of highest value on your farm?  For example, if protein is worth much more than fat and you are charged for volume, the ASI will identify the best production ratio for your herd.	
Profit and loss statements	Look at your sources of farm income? If non-milk income is a significant contributor to your net profit then consider the desirable traits required for this market.	
Are there features of your farming system to consider?	Do the labour inputs, calving pattern, number of cows or feeding system have an impact on the desirable traits required for your herd?	

## Step 2: Prioritise the traits

**ACHIEVING** genetic progress requires a consistent approach over a number of years. The next step is to emphasise the three to five traits of greatest importance to the success of your farm business.

From the list of traits in Step 1, prioritise the three to five traits you wish to focus on over the next five years.

List your priority traits	Circle one	
	More	Less
	More	Less
	More	Less
	More	Less
	More	Less

## Step 3: Compare notes

**AUSTRALIA** has a national breeding objective. Researchers have investigated the drivers of net profit across most farming systems and environments in Australia. Check your list against the research. Did you include?

Drivers of net profit	Is this relevant to you?	
Production	Yes	No
Milking Speed	Yes	No
Cell Count	Yes	No
Daughter Fertility	Yes	No
Survival (includes actual survival data, likability, overall type, udder depth, pin set)	Yes	No
Temperament	Yes	No
Liveweight	Yes	No

If you said yes to most of these traits, it is likely that your breeding objectives are consistent with the APR. If this is the case, focus on selecting high APR bulls as they will meet your herd's genetic requirements.

If your breeding objective is different, you should select high-ranking bulls that closely match your breeding objective.

### Or you could use Selectabull

To find the best bulls available for your breeding program



consider using Selectabull on the ADHIS website.

Selectabull is a web-based selection tool that lets you customise your breeding objective and allows you to search and rank all publishable bulls according to your breeding objective.

Selectabull is a free service, all you have to do is register on the ADHIS website. There is a 'How to use Selectabull' manual on the website or you could contact your local re-seller or ADHIS.

# Step 4: Finalise your Breeding Objective

Use your list of priority traits and the comparison to Australia's breeding objectives to finalise your objective.

My breeding objective is to increase farm profit by	Circle one	
	More	Less
	More	Less
	More	Less
	More	Less
	More	Less

Genetic improvement is permanent and compounding. Your breeding objective will allow you to make a more strategic investment in the genetic improvement of your herd while making the job of bull selection a little simpler.

The objective should be reviewed every 3-5 years.

Now, to think about this year's sire selections, go to the Breeding Plan worksheet.



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Australian Dairy Herd Improvement Scheme

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