

Part II –

Correct phenotype is the key to sustainable profitability

By JOHN O'BRIEN

FOR GENERATIONS GENETIC 'selection' within the 'Black and White' breed has been based on Stature, Angularity and Dairy Character = SAD. However, the growing dependency on computer program generated breeding values is showing up as a very SAD economic state indeed.

This selection of phenotype, ignoring moderate-framed, wide-based individuals, has led to a situation where frailty, poor constitution, poor adaptability and poor fertility is summed up in six words: Poor constitution! High maintenance! More cost!

As with the 'modern' Angus, the 'modern' Black and White cows are working, as in a supply and demand situation, for manufacturers of supplements. These animals are exceptionally high users – in fact, dependent consumers – of supplements and modern farming aids.

This is what is stirring me to write articles; breed strengths must be reintroduced into your stock to *put profit back into your pocket*.

Do you agree with the following? A computer program cannot adjust to economy, weather patterns or climate change of its own accord. No, it requires the human element and that element needs to be computer-literate and competent. Even then there are human errors. What information is used when writing the computer program? Are the figures and facts averaged out across the board or are they based on assumptions?

When does data entered change the forecast/figures in the reports? Are the reports responding to immediate timeframes when provided to you? Are they up-to-the-minute? Take all of this on board because important

decisions are based on these reports.

Consider the following:

- Education and experience produces an unbiased, accurate observation and identification in the relative environment and in truth is your only true research.
- You are likely to have been designing your beef herd to supply 'ideal' steers for an unsustainable fattening – that is, feedlot – system, yet to be *profitable* your production system needs to be grass-based. Can you make economic sense of this? It is ludicrous to keep maintaining these current practices and expect a profitable outcome.
- Is your seedstock supplier more focused on his profit margins than yours? Is his program based around figures, trends, fashionable sires and feed? Can you afford to create financial debt to follow his recommendations for the nutritional and genetic changes he is recommending?
- Are you introducing trendy – and, therefore, *easy to promote* – *genetics* rather than *profitable* genetics into your herd? If yes, who has your profits?
- Are you being introduced to cattle promising to produce great numbers, when all you truly require is great cattle?
- Is the computer program indicating detailed and specific recommendations with regard to your *cost of production* (COP)?
- Billions of dollars worldwide are spent by commercial dairy farmers on the touted 'genetic gain' in the Black and White breed. Now their solution is to mate the breed to any breed except Holstein. It wasn't the Black and White breed that was the problem. Years of incorrect phenotype selection within the breed – that is, at the seedstock level – has created and compounded the problems of the 'modern' Black and White cow.

... computer program-generated breeding values favour cattle with INCORRECT phenotypes and these values have been the key drivers of genetic decisions for the past two decades. The compounding negative effect is showing in your herd because all breeds have become too tall, too narrow and too lean.

Livestock



LEFT A sire with the phenotype of the bull pictured at left CANNOT produce a cow with the phenotype below. The cow has the phenotype of an efficient producer. The bull, on the other hand, has the phenotype of modern Black and White males when under nutritional stress.



- How does a pre-existing genetic bank isolate your identified requirements?
- How often has the question crossed your mind (or has it ever crossed your mind) that a substitute might have been used when the stockpile was to run out? Have you been one in the shortfall?
- Why is it that seedstock animals are not subjected to harsher conditions to ensure they can perform in a commercial environment? Isn't it in the commercial environment where their progeny will be required to perform?

Have a serious think about how computer-generated breeding values favour cattle with incorrect phenotypes. These values have been the key drivers for genetic decisions over the past two decades. The compounding negative effect of this is, right now, showing up in your herd. All breeds have become too tall, too narrow and too lean, and this equates to Poor constitution! High Maintenance! More cost!

The above three body-type characteristics

alone are a self-destructive mechanism so how does efficiency and effective performance in a grass-based environment *put profit back into your pocket*? Inadvertently you have dramatically changed the phenotype of your bovine herd and hence changed its nutritional requirements, raised your COP and endangered your sustainability. The time has come to stop making the same mistakes and take over responsibility.

At the time of writing I am already compiling an article regarding the Demise of The Functional Dairy Cow and would welcome your feedback (your gripes, the good, the bad and the ugly).

I look forward to hearing from you. ☺

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