

**THE ABILITY OF A.D.H.I.S. TO MEET
DAIRY FARMERS' NEEDS**

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Thank you for the opportunity to talk to you today from the grass roots Dairy Farmer viewpoint.

Dairymen are still somewhat apprehensive of the A.B.V's which, from our understanding, are the offspring of B.L.U.P as we first knew them. They are yet to stand the test of time as far as many farmers are concerned. Not many of us are aware or understand the information and methodology used in B.L.U.P. calculations to arrive at the A.B.V's, so to that extent the apprehension will remain for some time. What matters to us is that the best bulls and cows are accurately defined.

BULL ABV's

The selection of young bulls for progeny testing programmes now substantially depends on sires who have performed among the top of the A.B.V listings. This cuts across well proven ground by ignoring the very important old fashioned farmer criteria of selecting from cow families. There is no doubt in my mind the selection of young bulls from proven cow families still means a great deal to many dairymen.

To date, we have had two books released for the bull A.B.V's and both are based on the single trait of production broken up into litres of milk kg of fat and, in some cases, protein.

Providing separate listings, one for milk and the other for fat is an excellent and necessary approach and should be continued. In milk and fat order the listings are in sequence and one does not confuse plus and minus, but in the fat-for-milk-listing and milk-for-fat-listing as well as fat % and protein %, there is an urgent need for plus signs for clear identification. The addition in the December 1984 book of numbers of daughters and herds is very useful as it helps clear up the grey area of reliability of A.B.V's.

I firmly believe that future releases should contain further important information on conformation and workability. John Tenneson (1) summed up very well when he said: "the greatest danger to a breed is to allow its seedstock producers to fall into the trap of single trait selection rather than keeping a balanced perspective in their genetic pressure".

I am aware the A.D.H.I.S. has addressed itself to the need for

conformation but to have real value the assessments must be carried out by independent professional classifiers. The old habit of A.B. Centres doing their own assessment does not give the appearance of credibility nor a national approach.

In the workability section special attention must be paid to temperament. No matter what a female looks like or what she produces if her temperament is not good, then she does not come up to standard. We must remember that some with poor temperament may not even reach the dairy, so as well as examining the daughters at present in a herd, enquiries should be made of any daughters by the relevant sires that had been disposed of and if so why?

Ease of milking is also very important and great care must be used here. In today's dairying with increasing herd sizes and cow throughput per man hour, both temperament and ease of milking are very important considerations.

Now so far we have quiet, easy to milk heavy producing animals who look okay. What else do we need to complete the genetic circle - longevity of course. Cows must last in the herd and it is here that cow family histories are important. I have a fear that as many bulls are assessed on their daughters in first lactation and as we strive for genetic progress in production and type, there is a great danger we may be over-looking this important trait. Let us face it, the longer a cow lasts the more profitable she is, particularly if she calves every 12 months. The costs to come into the dairy are the same whether she lasts one lactation or ten. I always look closely at the number of lactations for the bulls dam, the dam and grand dam before making a selection.

One of the puzzles of Bull A.B.V's is the dramatic change in some bulls figures from different releases. This worries and puzzles many farmers, e.g.,

"CROSSLANDS GRIFFLAND"

January 1983 ABV				December 1984 ABV			
M	F	P	Rel	M	F	P	Rel
+446	+17	+14	64	-96	-3	+2	69

"QUANTOCK JOSIE STARLITE"

+208	+26	+5	69	-1	+15	-1	78
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In my opinion the above variations are unacceptable and the necessary steps must be taken to see this problem is ironed out. Maybe the trouble is insufficient daughters in early proof. Please do not tell me this is a problem we have to live with. A dairyman who has used these bulls now finds himself with heifers by bulls with current proofs of a standard he would not now use. It is just like finding your new car with flat tyres.

I readily acknowledge the massive undertaking to produce the A.B.V's from scratch but despite teething troubles and from my contact with many dairymen, the bull A.B.V.'s were well received and keenly studied. Some of the apprehension mentioned earlier should be settled when heifers

bred from bulls selected by A.B.V's and from cows with similarly high A.B.V's come into production, produce well and are of a satisfactory type.

Dairymen must, however, be able to translate A.B.V's in the same understanding as children translate their A B C's.

COW ABV's

The releases of cow A.B.V's have sent many a dairyman's blood pressure racing. It must be remembered bull A.B.V.'s are seen from a distance whereas cow A.B.V's are right at home for every herd recording farmer and they must make sense to him to be accepted. My initial reaction on receiving ours was to "sell the lot". The rolling herd average for our herd at the time of writing was 224 cows, 5847 litres, 223 kg fat and 205 kg protein. Despite this, we had very few cows plus for milk or fat. I am sure the cow A.B.V's have done more harm to their credibility in farmers minds than any other factor and I'm sure the main reason for this is the zero or base point. It is just crazy. Far far too many good cows are minus. Broadly speaking the good cows should be plus and the inferior minus. In plain language the good cows far outweigh the inferior in any herd. In many herds, particularly those with keen herd masters, the cow A.B.V's have just been "received" and dairymen stick to their own judgement of their own herd. No doubt their value is to identify the best cows to breed bulls from.

We are all well aware of how the zero point was arrived at and I am sure this could just as easily have been in another place. Mention must be made of the harm that can be done to our heifer export trade, which with the industries present over-production, is an important "spoke" in our dairy wheel.

What a marketing liability we have - when most of our dairy cows have minus ABV figures.

I am aware conversion tables, etc., are being prepared but many importers while aware of A.B.V's and may not be aware of such information.

Cows with a minus rating look bad and could result in loss of sales. One often hears that long-term the present zero point is about right. I have heard that famous phrase all my dairying life. As far as Australian dairymen are concerned, long-term is now.

The important point the A.D.H.I.S. has been slow in getting across to farmers is that A.B.V's are an estimate of breeding value and not a production value. Much more extension work needs to be done in this area.

One drawback certainly beyond A.D.H.I.S. control is that only approximately 30% of dairy cows are herd recorded so that many good breeding animals have no chance of being identified.

While I have criticised some aspects of the A.B.V's I would be among the first to realise that in a little over two years they have provided the genetic springboard for the Australian Dairy Industry. A.B.V's give or will give dairymen the necessary information to select from the National Genetic Pool for whatever trait or traits they desire and will continue to provide the impetus for the continuing task of improving breeding programmes.