

CROSS BREEDING, INCREASED INTEREST IN AUSTRALIA

“There has been a lot of interest in crossbreeding in Australia in the last 12 months”, says John Harle, the Red Breeds Expert at Genetics Australia.

Fortunately John was able to attend the International Red Cow Conference in South Africa last year and heard the talk presented by Prof. Les Hansen about the trials in California. John says that he has read reports from Alistair Dowie in the Australian Dairy Farmer and reports from James Hill in Genetics Australia’s magazine following their visit to California. More recently he spent two days with Kevin and Lori Prins, one of the Californian farming families from one of the trial farms, when they visited Australia.

John says that for those farmers considering a crossbreeding program for part or all of their herd, three basic points are being made by all of these people and advises that they should be considered when embarking on a program, here are his thoughts: -

1. The geneticists, supported by the Californian farmers on the farms used in the trial, definitely recommend a crossing program using three breeds. There is a need to select breeds that complement each other and are genetically distinct. Several breeds have been used on the trial farms in California, but in their situation, the three breeds favoured at the moment are Holsteins, Swedish Reds and Montbeliardes.
2. Everyone involved has pointed out the need to use high quality genetics from all the breeds used. Buying a cheap bull from the local saleyards will not achieve the desirable results.
3. You need good cow identification systems so that it is obvious to all farm staff what breed to mate that cow to. As well as having a good computer program, the general system favoured was to use coloured ear tags. As an example, if a cow has a red tag, mate it with Red semen, if a cow has a black tag, mate it with Holstein semen.

SETTING UP A CROSSBREEDING PROGRAM

Most farmers we have had discussions with agreed that two of the breeds of interest would be the Holsteins and the Reds. The debates were about the choice of the third breed. The contenders: the Jersey breed and the Montbeliarde breed. Perhaps this is an opportune time to tell breeders that *Genetics Australia* is now marketing Montbeliarde genetics sourced from Coopex Montbeliarde, the organisation with the largest Montbeliarde progeny testing program in France.

The answer between choosing the Montbeliardes and the Jerseys may vary from farm to farm, depending on the local situation. In really tough conditions, grazing with minimal supplementation, one would think the smaller Jerseys would be the better choice, however, remember the Montbeliarde breed was developed in the mountains of eastern France.

On a farm with a more consistent feed supply, possible use of by products, silage, Total Mixed Rations (TMR) etc., the Montbeliardes may be a better choice. One factor that will help the Montbeliardes will be the increased value of bull calves sired by them compared to the lower value of bull calves sired by Jersey bulls.

GETTING A START

As the Montbeliardes are large cattle, if you have a herd of basic Holsteins and Holstein/Jersey crosses, possibly the safest approach may be to mate the majority of these cattle initially with red genetics and then use Montbeliarde semen to mate to Red/Holstein crosses, starting with their second calf. If you have any doubts about the ability of your cows to calve easily – mate then to Reds or Jerseys. Judging

by the photos from California you should be very happy with the Montbeliarde/Holstein crosses. Then tag the calves with coloured tags and commence your rotation. I believe there is still a place for mating Jerseys or easy calving Reds or Holsteins to your maiden heifers regardless of which breeds you use from then on.

THE MONTBELIARDE SEMEN HAS ARRIVED – THE NEW GENETIC OPTION FOR AUSTRALIAN DAIRYFARMERS

We are very pleased to be marketing Montbeliarde semen sourced from Coopex Montbeliarde. Coopex Montbeliarde has the largest Montbeliarde progeny testing program in France, testing 130 high index young sires every year.

We searched for four proven bulls with good all-round proofs. The factors we looked for were high ratings for ISU (their equivalent of the APR profit), INEL (their equivalent of the ASI – Production) together with good ratings for type, particularly udders, low cell counts, daughter fertility, easy calving, good temperament and milking speed. The four bulls we selected are: -

PATINAGE
MASOLINO
OYAMA
PAPAYOU.

They all fully met our requirements by having good all-round proofs. Following the success of the Montbeliarde breed in the Californian trials, I anticipate many cross breeders will include semen of these bulls in their 2006 program.

One question raised is the concern about possible eye cancer with Montbeliardes and their crosses. To date it appears that it has not been a significant problem in California or in several African and South American countries where the breed is used. Also, having talked to colleagues in the beef industry, eye cancer is more a feature of the Hereford breed and few problems have ever been reported with Simmentals in Australia. There are no known common ancestors with Herefords and either Simmentals or Montbeliardes. There are obviously common ancestors between Simmentals and Montbeliardes.

As Montbeliardes are a red and white breed, broadly similar in appearance to milking Simmentals, I think many red breeders will also give them a try and find out what they have to offer compared to the other red genetics they are using. I predict with confidence that bull calves resulting from use of the Montbeliarde semen will be in high demand and they should fetch good prices. ■