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Breed Object site and last year were prepared to part with $21,750 to secure a half share in a herd sire.

Clients are contacted and visited on a regular basis and, most importantly, their comments are ‘taken on board’. Bulls are replaced, without any hesitation, if they do not meet client expectations and advice is freely given on bull selection issues.

Other successes for the Harmans include total clearance in their 2001 bull sale, averaging $5257 and progeny from their bulls topping three major 2001 weaner fairs in Northland.

The Harmans are a young couple ‘on the move’, displaying a growing confidence in their business, an insatiable thirst for knowledge and a refreshing readiness to adopt new technology. With an increasing number of contented bull clients and dramatically improving commercial production, they should be rapidly securing themselves a sound financial future.

Russell Priest

NZ backs BREEDPLAN

Arthur Rickards and Murray Scholz of ABRI spent a week in New Zealand recently to demonstrate the latest BREEDPLAN technology and outline the opportunities with ABRI’s Internet Solutions, BreedObject and the TGRM technology. Directors from eleven breeds representing over 90% of the seedstock industry attended and all breeds have renewed their commitment to BREEDPLAN with most contracts being rolled over for five years.

NZ Performance Beef Breeders at Feilding hosted the meetings. NZPBB does a great job in providing a multi-breed secretariat which achieves considerable economies of scale in servicing individual breeds.

Russell Priest visited ABRI and AGBU in February, 2002 and is well advanced in setting up the weightings for BreedObject indices that address the profit signals of the New Zealand beef industry (including dairy cross systems). The roll-out of Internet Solutions to New Zealand breeds is occuring throughout 2002.

Sam McIvor of Meat New Zealand is visiting Armidale in March, 2002 to discuss collaboration on research issues. It is to be hoped that Meat New Zealand will take the lead from MLA and channel resources into the development of a strategic plan for maximising the use of superior BREEDPLAN genetics in the commercial industry.

Arthur Rickards

Cloning - ready for the beef industry?

Last year, the research team at Monash University and Genetics Australia took a small skin sample from the ear of a bull called Rameses. These skin cells were stimulated to multiply in the laboratory and one of these cells was used to generate a calf called Rameses II, which is a genetic copy of Rameses himself. Of course, the laboratory grown skin cells can be frozen and theoretically could be used to make millions of additional genetically identical calves. Many groups around the world have been working on cloning using a variety of techniques but none can claim to have all the answers yet.

The ability to make cloned copies of adult animals was demonstrated half a century ago using frogs but until the birth of Dolly the sheep, it had not been possible with domestic animals.

Commercial beef producers are well aware of the benefits to be gained if it was possible to make many copies of the top AI beef bulls in the world. Beef breeders who used BREEDPLAN will appreciate the need to link together herds through the use of common AI sires. The availability of cloned bulls would help improve linkages between herds, but without the need to use artificial insemination.

Despite the birth of over 200 cloned animals world-wide over the last few years (including a number of transgenic cloned animals), there remain many hurdles to overcome before the technology becomes widely used in agriculture. The technology is still expensive, inefficient, with low pregnancy rates, high losses during pregnancy (especially in the first 3 months of pregnancy) and after the calf is born.

In addition to these practical problems, there are a number of real and imagined problems that need to be sorted out prior to the acceptance of cloning. These include human heath and safety, animal welfare and other ethical and PR issues. While cloning differs from genetic modification in that no genetic manipulation is involved, in recent times it has become clear that public perception, and more particularly market concerns about the use of cloning, may limit commercial application unless these public concerns are addressed and satisfied.

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