The catalyst for the global evaluation will be the international Hereford genetic linkage program. This is a donor program between Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA - Australia's peak body for red meat industries) and the Australian Hereford and Poll Hereford societies. The results of the linkage project and the development of global evaluation options will be reported to the conference during a keynote session presented by Dr Hans Graser, David Johnston and Kath Donoghue from the Animal Genetics and Breeding Unit (AGBU - the genetics Research and Development group in Armidale which develops the international BREEDPLAN genetic evaluation programs).

The linkage project has been established using reciprocal matings of 8 international sires (four Australian, two US and two Canadian) across Australia, United States and Canada, with secondary links in the UK and Ireland. Progeny from the link sires are being fully evaluated for growth, feed efficiency and carcase traits, with sample groups on display at the conference. The Australian progeny have birth and weaning data on file and the steers commence a 90-day feedlot finishing and feed efficiency test in November, 2003. The North American progeny are approaching weaning and the UK/Irish progeny are yearlings (Nov 2003).

Given that the performance data from Hereford cattle in Australia and New Zealand is combined in a BREEDPLAN evaluation, and that strong genetic links exist between the Hereford populations in North and South America, global linkage will be established by the project.

The logistics of proceeding to a global evaluation have been simplified because all the major Hereford populations around the world will be using BREEDPLAN technology. A further bonus of the project will be the validation of EBVs in the field. The birth/weaning results already in from the linkage program demonstrate the accuracy of sire EBVs in predicting progeny performance for those traits.

Bob Freer
Project Manager and consultant to Australian Hereford and Poll Hereford societies

The 14th World Hereford Conference to be held is Armidale, Australia at the end of March 2004 will discuss progress towards a world genetic evaluation of the Hereford breed. This is becoming a possibility via a new genetic linkage project and the fact that the BREEDPLAN genetic evaluation system is now used by Hereford breeders in eight countries. BREEDPLAN developments in several of these countries are discussed in this newsletter along with information on the conference.
This annual newsletter normally comes out in Autumn, but we are earlier this year to include information on the World Hereford Congress (see P5). This is from March 26th - 29th, at Armidale university, which of course also houses BREEDPLAN HQ, so there will be significant sessions on performance recording.

The past year seems unfortunately to have been very drought-oriented for a large part of our clientele. There are still areas short of feed and/or water, and of course even where feed is now OK, the financial drain lingers. I’ve heard amazing drought survival stories and community assistance efforts and will just share one: A semi-retired cattle consultant, now living on the NSW coast wanted to do something to help. He organised dinners and various other functions and raised a substantial sum. By phoning a friend in western NSW, he was given contacts for some young families who “were significant contributors to the industry and their district and really in need”. They were, I am sure very grateful to receive truckloads of fodder.

On the positive side, droughts always make us review strategies and I know of people forced to early wean, who now will do so more often in average seasons. Drought also challenges fertility, so we have several stories in this issue on BREEDPLAN fertility-related matters. A new development here is that plans are in hand to include AI data in calculating the female fertility EBV, days to calving (DC). To obtain accurate EBVs, with or without AI, requires more comprehensive recording than is currently done by many herds however (see page 6).

MENTORING? Efforts continue to find new ways of improving BREEDPLAN use by commercial and stud breeders. At one ‘buzz group’ I attended to plan new initiatives, a suggestion was made that mentors may help some new members. If you are an experienced BREEDPLAN member prepared to do some mentoring OR have recently joined and would appreciate a mentor - please contact me and I will assist the connections.

Best wishes for 2004 - a wetter one!

Breedplan News  -  Issue 14, January 2004

editor's notes

Angus boost in Argentina

The Bustingorri group of Angus breeders in Argentina have had another very successful year. There are now 20 herds in BREEDPLAN, up by 25%. Commercial beef producers are seeking out and paying good money for bulls with BREEDPLAN EBVs.

As in South Africa, the time has come to engage a local consultant to handle the many issues involved in market development, not least of which is getting technical and marketing information available in Spanish in hard copy and on the Web. Maria Calafé is an Argentinian Vet who has been closely involved with the BREEDPLAN activities of the Bustingorri group. She was sponsored into Australia by ABRI for three weeks last July/August where she was given training in BREEDPLAN and herdMASTER and visited a lot of BREEDPLAN herds - particularly as they were having ultrasound scanning done by Roger Evans. Maria is now a BREEDPLAN guru. Her tasks in the next 12 months are many and varied and include compiling in Spanish a number of items including Breed Notes, breeder instructions, BREEDPLAN report headings, BREEDPLAN promotion and herdMASTER promotion. Maria will also provide support so that breeders understand how to use BREEDPLAN effectively. She will be focussing on data quality.

We have set Maria an ambitious goal. She is aiming to increase BREEDPLAN usage in the Bustingorri group by 50% in the next twelve months. With some very large herds showing interest, this is entirely feasible. Watch this space!

Arthur Rickards
BREEDPLAN in North America

When you talk about North American (USA plus Canada) Herefords, the statistics are like telephone numbers - over 23 million pedigree animals in the combined databases, 7.6M weights and 4.6M calving ease scores. It is gratifying that the Associations involved have put their collective weight behind BREDPLAN International.

Pedigree Register
The pedigree database of the American Hereford Association (AHA) contains over 21 million animal records. This was formed by merging data from the American Polled Hereford Association with that of AHA. Unfortunately, initial attempts to do this by two USA-based companies were only partially successful. That is when ABRI was engaged.

Internet Solutions
The AHA was an early user of ABRI's Internet Solutions - for animal /member enquires and sale catalogues. This service regularly receives over 100,000 hits per month - by far the highest of any beef cattle association using ABRI's software. This basic service has now been extended to include internet registrations, inventory updates, collection of performance data and on-farm printing of AHA generated reports. Those members who elect to use the internet as their data submission method are able to use pre-built worksheets and batches. These worksheets already contain those animals which would have been pre-printed for them in AHA's paper-based recording system. In addition, these members receive faster turnaround of their data, as they are automatically notified via email whenever new worksheets are available for their use, or when updated performance reports have been generated for them to print (also see p18).

Performance recording
The AHA has a very strong performance recording program with weaning weights captured on around 68,000 calves annually. Over 2400 herds are involved and these herds run 80% of all the cows on the AHA inventory. An across-herd genetic evaluation is run twice per year which also includes the performance data from Canada. The combined performance database is five times larger than that of any Australasian genetic evaluation conducted by ABRI. Historically, this work had been performed by the University of Georgia. However, a switch was made to BREDPLAN in order to gain the advantages of a fully integrated breed register which provides AHA with a high level of control over all of its computing.

herdMASTER
A strategic focus of AHA is to move towards a paperless recording system. Consistent with this objective, ABRI's Saltbush Division developed herdMASTER using the latest tools from Microsoft. The new software was trialled extensively by Vern Raush of Rausch Hereford Farms whose on-farm database has records on in excess of 20,000 cattle.

Vern is enthusiastic about the new product. Over 100 herdMASTER systems have been purchased by AHA members in the last two years. A web-based version of herdMASTER will be available in 2004 and actively marketed to the small to medium-sized studs.

Summary
The AHA is one of the largest beef cattle associations in the world. After working with ABRI for four years, its services to breeders have been transformed into world’s best practice. The advanced data processing system has empowered the AHA to develop aggressive plans for increasing the market share of Hereford genetics in North America.

Arthur Rickards
Managing Director, ABRI

http://breedplan.une.edu.au

Craig Huffhines
Executive Vice President
American Hereford Association.

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"This proved to be the best decision that AHA could have made" said Craig Huffhines.

The ABRI's software identified and removed data anomalies to enable a clean pedigree system to go into production in 4th quarter 1999 on budget and on time.

The AHA registers around 70,000 herdbook cattle per year but over 100,000 new Hereford calves are added to the AHA database each year. The recording system is fast, robust and reliable.

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Arthur Rickards
Managing Director, ABRI

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BREEDPLAN in South America

The Hereford Associations of both Argentina and Uruguay have been heavily involved in the introduction of BREEDPLAN technology over the last year. This follows a visit to Armidale in March, 2002 by Dr Fernando Alfonso of the Uruguayan Society and Maximo Ayerza of the Hereford Association in Argentina. Both groups had previously pooled data for a genetic evaluation conducted by the University of Georgia (UGA). On receiving a presentation on BREEDPLAN, the representatives of both countries were satisfied that this was the right technology for the Hereford breed in South America.

Data sets from both Associations were sent to BREEDPLAN’s Dr Brad Crook early in 2003. A South American database was established and ABRI converted the data from both Associations into the BREEDPLAN format. Brad then undertook a number of across-country genetic evaluations and tabulated the results for on site discussions.

In late April 2003, Brad made the long journey to Buenos Aires (BA), where he was met by Juan Bullo and Dr. Daniel Musi on behalf of the Argentine Association and Dr Daniel de Mattos, the then technical advisor to the Hereford Society in Uruguay.

During the next week Brad had a strenuous but rewarding program in both Argentina and Uruguay. It included a technical explanation of the BREEDPLAN technology, comparisons of the BREEDPLAN results with those from UGA, an overview of BREEDPLAN services such as the breed register and herd management software, discussions of the steps in a systematic approach to national breed improvement, visits to a number of leading Hereford ranches and a visit to the INIA beef cattle research facility in Uruguay. This was a most valuable program that helped to define how BREEDPLAN could be best used to benefit Hereford cattle in the countries visited. On his return, Brad did some fine tuning of the BREEDPLAN parameters and completed the first production evaluation of Argentine/Uruguayan Hereford data. This is the first time that a single multi-trait evaluation model has been used on all weight performance data from the two countries. The analysis included an impressive total of over 78,000 birth weights, 200,000 weaning weights and 237,000 post-weaning weights, producing BREEDPLAN Estimated Progeny Differences (EPDs) and accuracies on 8,000 sires and 108,000 dams. The Argentine Association released results to its breeders. The Society of Uruguay plans to participate fully in 2004 with its latest data (including over 10,000 ultrasound scan and scrotal size records) in a full multi-trait evaluation, releasing BREEDPLAN results to breeders.

The ABRI is developing a long-term strategy for implementing a wide range of BREEDPLAN and related technologies in both Uruguay and Argentina. This is very exciting news for the Hereford breed in South America which will be able to link with innovative BREEDPLAN developments elsewhere in the world and with the North American Hereford associations in particular.

Arthur Rickards
Gaining market share in Southern Africa

Since the last newsletter we are pleased to report that the South African Braford and Limousin societies have recently joined the BREEDPLAN International system. The six South African societies now on BREEDPLAN represent 46% of the total beef membership in this country. The Namibian Stud Breeders Association representing 18 breed societies has had their new system installed, on time and according to contract. Marcus O’Sullivan did a huge job and the NSBA staff is now handling all registration and performance functions. Thanks to the ABRI team for all their hard work.

The herdMASTER program has successfully been introduced into the market and we now provide full-time herdMASTER support to our clients. Clients have responded positively to the program and with strong support from Saltbush we expect herdMASTER to become the leading herd management package in the Southern African market.

BREEDPLAN in Southern Africa has also combined forces with the largest Agricultural Journal (an Afrikaans weekly called the Landbouweekblad) to host the Landbouweekblad/BREEDPLAN bull, cow group and bull of the year competition. We have managed to convince one of our largest retailers, called Pick n Pay, to become the main sponsor of the competition with R1 M ($200 000) over a five year period (Incidentally, Pick n Pay recently acquired much of the Franklins chain in Australia). We recently had our first prize-giving event and the seedstock producer of the year winner is Brian Angus (from the Angus society) who has won a trip to Australia. Thanks to Mike Stephens from the Australian BIA who also helped with the competition.

There are many similarities between our countries in terms of production systems and conditions. It thus makes sense for our societies to work together to strengthen genetic links across countries so that we can ultimately combine our analyses. Finally, we South Africans are passionate about our rugby union. Whilst this article is being written, the rugby world cup is in full swing. The BREEDPLAN system is used in many of the countries participating in this world cup. I trust that you have also enjoyed the games and the best team ultimately won.

Michael Bradfield

Dr Brad Crook recently spent 2 weeks in South Africa and Namibia educating society staff on the finer details of the BREEDPLAN performance system. Brad stressed that the societies are now in complete control of all registration, performance and evaluation functions. The societies are very exited about the opportunity to give an improved service to their members. Brad also used the opportunity to visit a number of our breeders.

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