

Elevating genomic herd strategies

For the past decade, genomics has dominated dairy herd improvement discussions. Genetic testing has allowed AI companies to identify the very best young sires and enabled producers to adjust breeding strategies to accelerate genetic advances in their herds.

Paul Krueger, Semex Vice President, Global Key Account & Solutions Strategy, believes dairy producers are awash with genetic results and information on their animals. What's been missing is strategy and advice on how to utilize all that information to make simple, confident, genetic management and mating decisions.

A big part of this challenge is understanding the female component of genetic improvement. How do producers identify the very best females in their herd and ensure they're contributing to genetic enhancement on their farm?

AUTOMATING GENETIC HERD STRATEGY

Krueger is confident Semex can help address these questions with the launch of Elevate, the only automated genetic herd strategy tool available to producers. With Elevate, there's no more cumbersome spreadsheets and confusing data, says Krueger. Producers determine their breeding goals and strategy by identifying key production, health and type traits. Then Semex's OptiMate mating program takes over, matching female genomic profiles with bulls that improve the herd. Selecting your females and managing samples is all done in Semex's Elevate App.

What really makes Elevate unique says Krueger, is its simplicity and ability to link to Immunity+, giving producers the ability to identify their disease resistant females.

"Tapping into the Immunity+ females is great because our initial data is showing that animals ranked high for immunity have 42% less disease than those that would be average or low within their population," says Krueger. "Producers can use that knowledge to identify high, medium and low immune responders in the herd and bolster offspring by using Immunity+ sires on those animals to raise immunity levels across the next generation."

Immunity♀
GENOMICS F OR FEMALES

BREEDING WITH CONFIDENCE

Access to Immunity+ through Elevate also plays a key role in helping producers identify and execute their breeding strategy. For example, Krueger notes that identifying genetically inferior heifers allows producers to make management decisions that minimize the potential negative impact they can have on profitability. The same is true for identifying high-responders. These heifers can be confidently bred with sexed semen to realize the highest and fastest genetic gain for the herd.

Elevate's biggest attraction may very well be its simplicity. "You really can do everything through your phone - everything is in the palm of your hand," says Krueger. "You can use it to grab samples and utilize it to simplify your sample collection. I think producers will also like the fact that we're going to tell them which animals need testing and identify those that don't."

Globally, producers are looking for more efficiency in how they invest their dollars and Elevate can help, adds Krueger.

TAKING LARENWOOD FARMS TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Like many dairy producers, Chris McLaren of Drumbo, Ontario's Larenwood Farms has been genetic testing heifers for years.

For McLaren, knowing what to do with the information and how to use it to make better breeding decisions has always proved challenging. But things have changed since he first logged into Elevate in May 2018.

"It's definitely taken things to the next level," says McLaren who milks 100 Holstein cows with his family in a sand-bedded, freestall dairy. Larenwood is also a three-time winner of the CanWest DHI National Herd Management Score Award.

After playing catchup to test older heifers when he started using Elevate, McLaren now tests newborn heifers each month and has acted quickly based on the results. Elevate includes the Immunity+ disease resistant genetics program and it's factored heavily in McLaren's decisions. "Any heifer that's a low immune responder we're

breeding them right away to Immunity+ bulls. With that information, we also use the OptiMate program to select heifers for Semexx sexed semen."

McLaren also identifies heifers to be bred to young sires and cows that should be bred to beef sires. "We're really trying to speed up genetic progress of the herd by pinpointing the ones that will have the best genetics for the future."

Strategically, Larenwood Farms, wants to "stay above the industry's genetic improvement curve and produce heifers that have the genetics and the potential to excel. I just see Elevate as a way to accelerate this and put some genetics in our herd that will produce healthy, long-lasting, well put together animals," says McLaren.