



Holstein Canada,

I have read your Canadian Breed Strategy and, for what it's worth, I thought I would give you my feedback on it.

Today's challenges

In reading through your top challenges, it seems that you have missed the biggest issue of all. The majority of the dairy cattle in Canada are not registered. For me that is the elephant in the room that has been left out of your breed strategy. How can you begin to advance the breed when the majority of the cattle in that breed are not on your programs?

Instead of focusing on the issue that the majority of dairy farmers are facing, this strategy seems to focus on the vocal minority. I know the old adage of the squeaky wheel gets the oil, but that should not be what guides us as an industry. We need to keep an eye on the marketplace as a whole instead of just niche segments.

Goal 1 - Enhance Selection Criteria That Provide the Best Genetics to Canadian Holstein Producers and the World

There is no question that this is a time of great change for many breeders, and many are uncertain about what direction to take in going forward. I am extremely happy to see Holstein Canada and its Board gets behind genomics and its many uses. There is no question that education is the key. It's also great to see that you see that providing the economic impact is key to getting producer buy in.

I do find it interesting that you have the objective "Select the very best young genomic sires from a large number of families without sacrificing genetic diversification and ensure an optimum proportion eventually become proven sires." Is this not the role of the Artificial Insemination companies?

Regarding mating programs, most of the larger A.I. companies' mating programs already account for inbreeding when making mating recommendations. Some just allow for a certain threshold while others actually account for the rate of inbreeding and the effect on resulting progeny.

This connects to your next comment about R-Value. To have a national index that lowers sires with the highest R-Value, would actually do a disservice to producers. Wouldn't it be much better to develop or encourage the use of a mating program that already does this? This should not be part of the overall ranking system but should rather be an animal by animal tool. Maybe something they could do online when they search or lookup an animal.

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With so many different production environments and different management styles, you cannot have one index that will suit everyone. Having said that, TPI has become the standard throughout the world for marketing purposes. When talking with the majority of producers around the world, many are actually more fans of indexes like NM\$ etc. than TPI. If we were to revamp the LPI maybe we should model it after the NM% system but weight it according to the CDN milk price system.

I am a big fan of aggressively promoting Canadian Holsteins. This is something that has been lost as many A.I. companies have lost their regional focus and are now global corporations.

Goal 2 - Develop and Maintain Animal Evaluation Systems That Accurately Assess Profitable and Trouble-Free Holsteins in Order to Increase Participation in Genetic Management Programs

While we all know my bias for the Canadian Type Classification System, it certainly is not perfect. A greater focus on longevity (i.e. mobility) is very much in order. A VG-89-2YR is not currently the epitome of a functional cow. When I take a look at all the animals scored 89 as a 2 year old, I am hard pressed to see them as the perfect functional cow. While they are all great looking cows (and we know I am a fan of that), they are not necessarily the most functional cows.

When you say “Ensure that core services (1) are adaptive and flexible for new data collection opportunities and (2) capitalize on changes to herd demographics (herd size, commercial focus, intense management styles).” Does that mean you are open to incorporating producer-generated data into genetic evaluations etc.?

Goal 3 - Intensify Collaboration and Exchange between Industry Partners to Gain Efficiencies and Increase Effectiveness

Was this not the goal of the amalgamation of CDN and yourself that your membership rejected? Where does that leave amalgamation with milk recording or with Holstein USA?

Goal 4 - Support DFC in Their Quest to Implement a National Traceability System for Dairy Cattle

Is this not mandated by the Canadian Government? (FYI the pages in your PDF are out of order 4, comes after 5)

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Goal 5 - Cultivate a Group of Passionate and Unified Young Leaders Who Are Knowledgeable and Enthusiastic Advocates for the Dairy Industry Who Will Become Committed To Breed Advancement and Industry Sustainability in Their Chosen Careers

I must say this is the one area that I have seen the greatest improvement in over the recent years. There is no question that youth are the future. Education and the use of social media are the two greatest ways to achieve this.

In Summary

There is no question that this is a time of uncertainty in our industry. The industry is changing at the greatest rate in history. In order to lead through this, we need all partners to stand up and show leadership. It is great to see that Holstein Canada is starting down this road. While I find the breed strategy solid in many areas, the fact that it misses the elephant in the room (commercial producers) has me concerned about the sustainable relevance of this strategy.

Regards,

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