

Cow Size Doesn't Really Matter

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A 1988 Penn State study reported relationships of type traits and survival to 4.5 years of age.

Registered and grade cattle were separated for analysis with very different results for the two groups.

For registered cattle, most type traits had a positive correlation with survival. But for grade cows, only four traits had a significant relationship with survival to 4.5 years.

These traits included udder depth (shallower), teat placement (closer), stature (shorter), and body depth (shallower).

Why different results for registered and grade? Probably because registered cattle are kept if they are perceived as being desirable in their conformation. Beauty doesn't influence grade culling decisions.

The same study looked at survival to seven years — for grade cows, udder depth and teat placement were the only type traits with significant relationships with survival.

The University of Minnesota (Crookston) has conducted a genetic study with dairy cattle since 1968 that focuses on cow size.

Bulls must be in the top half of the active AI bulls for production (currently fat plus protein pounds is used as the production trait). Beyond this, only size is looked at to select service sires for the cows in the herd.

Holstein Association STA's are combined with the index: 2 (stature) + strength + body depth. Semen is used in the herd from the three most extreme bulls each direction in each year.

Large bulls are used only on the large-size cow group, and small bulls are used only on the small-size cow group.

The University of Minnesota study has generated a herd of cows with tremendous differences for cow size, with differences due mostly to genetics.

Numerous studies have been conducted with the large and small genetic groups.

Health costs were compared, and there were no group differ-

ences except that the large group had significantly more displaced abomasums.

Production has never differed significantly for the groups. However, the large cows have substantially greater dry matter intake.

With no difference in production, clearly smaller cows are more efficient producers.

A recent study of feed intake with the size selection herd involved splitting the herd into three groups based on what they actually weighed (phenotype), small, medium or large.

Although cows have stacked pedigrees for large versus small size, there still is overlap of the two groups for actual body weight of cows.

Accounting for difference in size of bull calves for sale and salvage value of cows, estimates of income over feed cost for 2½ lactations favored small cows

(\$5,118) over medium (\$5,110) and large cows (\$5,041). Differences of health costs and survival were not included in these estimates.

Why place any emphasis on cow size in selection decisions?

If we select for productivity alongside important type traits for survival (udders and feet), won't the cow tell us how large she needs to be?

There is little evidence that bigger is better for size of dairy cows. In fact, there is mounting evidence that smaller Holstein cows may have economic advantages.

Comments by Dr. Les Hansen of the University of Minnesota, will be downplayed by some and ignored by others, but as he says, "There is mounting evidence that smaller Holsteins may have economic advantages."

Much of the difference among

sire evaluations for type can be traced to bulls that sire big animals, versus those siring more moderately-sized cattle.

In the show ring, there is no question that the class winners and the champions are extremely large for their age and usually sired by bulls with average or below average production summaries.

Hansen's comments call attention to the old adage, "Bigger isn't always better."

Author's Note: Taken from remarks by Dr. Les Hansen of The University of Minnesota at a dairy cattle breeding seminar during this year's World Dairy Exposition in Madison, Wisconsin.



Pa. Holstein Conventions Set

STATE COLLEGE (Centre Co.) — The Pennsylvania Holstein Association is reminding members of all ages about the upcoming

conventions to be held February at the Ramada Inn-Gettysburg.

Deadlines for registration are fast approaching.

The Junior Holstein Convention is first, running Feb. 11-13 with a weekend theme of "Blue meets Grey," reflecting the historic significance to the Gettysburg area.

Along those lines, tours have been scheduled to visit the Gettysburg Battlefields and view the Cyclorama, which shows the many battles that took place around Gettysburg.

Workshops have been planned on how to develop and lay out an advertisement, how to put together a Distinguished Junior Member book for competition, and also a tour has been set to go to Penn-Gate Farms for a workshop on selecting show heifers.

The annual Junior Holstein Association meeting is to be held, which is to include a review of the past year and a discussion of plans for 1994. In addition, directors are to be elected.

A special award is also to be presented to the county with the most Junior members in attendance at the annual meeting.

The dairy bowl contest is to be held with the winning teams that represented Pennsylvania at the national contest in Seattle, Washington.

A Saturday night dinner is also on the itinerary, with door prizes, including cattle embryos, to be offered. After dinner entertainment is a dance and Karaoke.

A Sunday awards program is to feature presentations to many Juniors who have done outstanding work in a variety of areas of Junior Holstein Association activity.

Also during the weekend, there are to be commercial exhibits, a dairy bar, use of an indoor swimming pool, and time to visit with friends.

Deadline for registration for tickets and room reservations is Jan. 24. Reservations should be made at the Ramada Inn, 1-800-776-8349.

For tickets to the Junior Convention, send an order form to Sharon Hammond, 1747 Holly Pike, Carlisle, PA 17013, or call (717) 486-4934 after 5 p.m.

Later in the month, from Feb. 24 to Feb. 26, the Pa. Holstein Association Convention is set to be held, with southcentral counties serving as host.

The convention committee, chaired by Steve and Chris Wood, of Penn-Gate Farms, has scheduled a number of tours and activities for attendees.

Of some of the highlights, tours are to be Thursday, Feb. 24, along with an fun-focused evening program; the banquet is scheduled to be held Friday evening, and the convention sale has been set for Saturday, 10:30 a.m., in the Ramada Inn-Gettysburg ballroom.

Additional events on Friday include an awards breakfast, a ladies program, and annual meeting. The planning committee is also scheduling different programs and speakers for the convention.

For more information, call the Holstein Association at (814) 234-0364.

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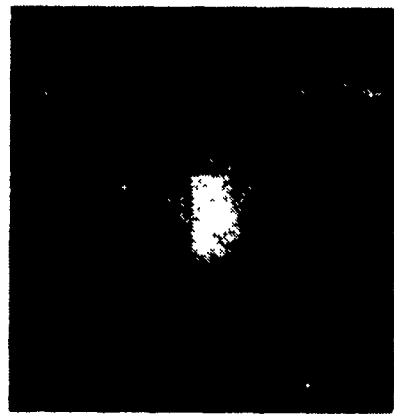
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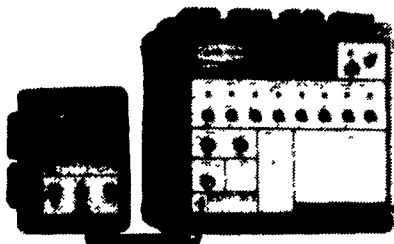
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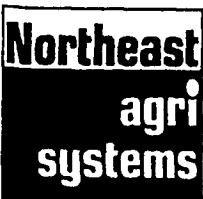


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