

Holstein A-Values For Merchandising, Evaluation

BRATTLEBORO, Vt. — While the A-Value Program appeals to Holstein breeders looking for an additional evaluation and marketing tool, it also appeals to others in the industry involved in merchandising Holsteins. Both sale managers and AI personnel have expressed interest in the new program.

The Holstein Association's A-Value Program uses actual performance data, and was initiated by Association members in 1992. A-Values recognize the value of cow families. Starting in late 1996, the Holstein Association will begin producing official A-Value Herd Reports and printing official A-Values on pedigrees, providing breeders with information previously unavailable.

Many breeders have expressed favorable reactions to the program, noting that A-Values will provide another selection tool when the merchandise their Holsteins. Others within the industry have agreed, saying tools like this are needed.

"I think this is exciting," said Tom Morris, sale manager from Amery, Wis. "Any tool that helps make the breed better is certainly an asset. This gives credit to cows and cow families within herds and across the population of the breed that have been performing over the long haul."

Morris added he thought A-Values would be a "great ranking tool."

"I've waited for this a long time, and I think we've really needed it," he said. "This has generated a great deal of interest, maybe as much interest as has been generated in a long, long time. I think people are really interested in it."

Dick Chichester of Select Sires in Plain City, Ohio, noted he thought the A-Value Program could prove beneficial.

"I think the concept of the A-Value system is desirable and useful," he said. "I know of many herds who have an excellent breeding program, use the best bulls, are excellent managers and

excellent cullers, but they have no indexes."

Chichester went on to say he didn't think the index system was "the beginning or the end of the way to breed cows. But in herds like that, it seems to me until we have a better index system, this is certainly a worthy effort."

Chichester and Morris both are strong believers in cow families, as is Pete Blodgett of Alta Genetics, Landmark Division in Hughson, Calif. Blodgett said he was not sure how A-Values would affect the industry until it had passed the test of time.

"A-Values really won't change the rankings of cows now ranked high," he said, "but it may change others' rankings."

Blodgett added he didn't know how A-Values would be received until they were out and available. "We think the current USDA system is recognized around the world, and has served us pretty well," he said. "But the A-Values will be good if it sorts out the genetics we're not now

using. If it proves to be a true genetic transmitter to sons, daughters, and grandsons, then it's good."

The method for determining A-Values is relatively simple. Performance measures of a cow and her next three dams in the maternal line are used in calculating the A-Values for the cow herself. Actual performance for milk, fat, protein, and type (final score) is the primary basis of the A-Value Program.

All A-Values will be expressed as percentile rankings 0-9. Each animal will have an A-Value (percentile ranking) for milk, fat, protein, type, and an "overall" A-Value that combines the traits protein, fat and type at a ratio of 9:3:8 respectively.

The three agreed that allowing A-Values the opportunity to be accepted industry-wide is necessary.

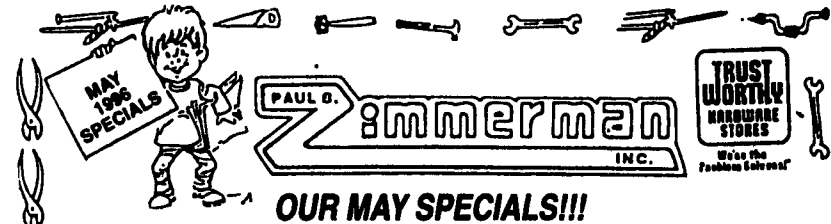
"I think it would be an error in judgment to write this off immediately, but by the same token, I

think it would be an error to adopt it as the one and only way to look at genetics," Chichester said.

Blodgett expressed similar thoughts. "We'll certainly stand back and look at the program," he said. "We'll certainly give it a shot."

Morris says that dairymen everywhere are looking for the same thing from dairy cows, and having another tool to select them is important.

"There is no question that dairymen everywhere — whether they are a registered breeder or a commercial milk producer — are looking for the same basic type cow," he said. "They want a cow that's easy to work with, that requires a limited amount of maintenance, and has proven production over an extended period of time. It should be our goal as an Association and as a breed to help dairymen in this country and worldwide breed a more profitable cow, and I think A-Values will be a tool to do that."



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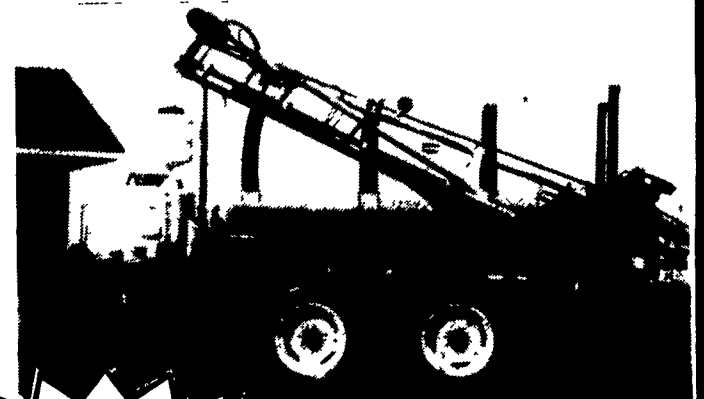


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