



Breed Improvement Article

Docility

By Sean McGrath

One of the priority areas identified during the Genetic Focus Conferences held in Brandon and Regina was that of docility. Concerns were raised questioning whether docility was a real or perceived problem, and more importantly that perceptions regarding docility may be keeping potential customers from using and benefiting from Limousin genetics.

Canadian producers are not alone in this concern. Docility was identified as a major concern in the United States as well, and it was for this reason that the North American Limousin Foundation (NALF) initiated a docility scoring system and genetic evaluation several years ago.

The role of the docility EPD is three fold. The docility evaluation tells the commercial industry that Limousin breeders are actively engaged in addressing and correcting a real or perceived problem area. It also helps to identify bloodlines that are quieter and also individual animals that are quiet within less docile lines. As well, it is a marketing tool to quantitatively address potential buyer concerns.

Several Canadian breeders have also collected this type of information on their seedstock, however it was never included in the genetic evaluation until this year. December of 2002 represents the first time that Canadian docility information has been included in genetic evaluation conducted at Colorado State University.

Docility EPDs are reported in terms of percent probability that offspring will score either a 1 or 2 on the docility scoring system. For example, if Sire A has a docility EPD of +20 and Sire B a docility EPD of +5 we would expect 15% more of Sire A's calves to be scored as either 1 (docile) or 2 (restless) when compared to calves of Sire B.

Docility scoring information is collected on calves at the time of processing for weaning. Scores should be reported on all calves (not just the wild ones) in order to provide a basis for comparison within the contemporary group. All breeders are encouraged to submit this type of information on their cattle.

Admittedly management and cattle handling techniques can have a huge impact on docility, however certain cattle will still stand out as being "wilder" than others regardless of management conditions.

Does this solve the problem?

Perception is reality, however the perception of a problem is often more difficult to change than the reality surrounding it. Docility scoring and docility EPDs do not solve the problem of wild seedstock, breeders do. The docility EPD is a tool to quantitatively represent temperament for the genetic and marketing toolbox.

Accurately representing seedstock and their temperament to customers and culling those that are wild and aggressive are key to changing perceptions in the industry. As stated before, the docility evaluation shows that Limousin breeders are serious about addressing this issue and changing perceptions. It provides a selection tool for breeders and a marketing angle for breeders and the Association to use in the industry to address concerns.

Docility Scoring System

Docility Score		Description
1	Docile	Mild disposition, gentle and easily handled, stands and moves slowly during processing, undisturbed, settled, somewhat dull, does not pull on headgate when in chute, exits chute calmly
2	Restless	Quieter than average but slightly restless, may be stubborn during processing, may try to back out of chute, pulls back on headgate, some flicking of tail, exits chute promptly
3	Nervous	Typical temperament, manageable but nervous and impatient, a moderate amount of struggling, movement and tail flicking, repeated pushing and pulling on headgate, exits chute briskly
4	Flighty (Wild)	Jumpy and out of control, quivers and struggles violently, may bellow and froth at mouth, continuous tail flicking, defecates and urinates during processing, frantically runs fence line and may jump when penned individually, exhibits long flight distance (how close animal will allow you to come to them before moving away) and exits chute wildly
5	Aggressive	Similar to score 4 but with added aggressive behaviour, fearful, extreme agitation, continuous movement which may include jumping and bellowing while in chute, exits chute frantically and may exhibit attack behaviour when handled alone
6	Very Aggressive	Extremely aggressive temperament, "killers", pronounced attack behaviour