

## Making decisions with genomics

**Andrew Duynhoven**

**Region: South-West Victoria**

**Topic: Genomic testing**

With more cattle than he could handle, Andrew Duynhoven was in an interesting position.

Overstocked – with more on the way – the south-west Victorian dairy farmer knew he had an opportunity for extra income but wanted to be sure his next move was the right one.

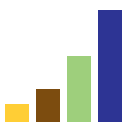
Enter genomic testing.

For years the Bookaar farmer had heard about the merits of genomic testing from his brother-in-law Chris Place.

He understood how it worked – but hadn't taken the step to implement the practice on-farm. He hadn't thought he'd needed to – until recently.

“I was in a position where I have 100 heifers coming in this year calving to sexed semen, a third had already calved and I'm already at capacity milking 390 cows on 400 acres (160 ha),” he said.

“This meant I had to make room for these 100 heifers, plus I have 121 calves on the ground from last year. It's a unique position but I had to do something to select the ones I'd keep.”



Andrew knew that the 'best bang for your buck' was selling heifers to the export market at 200 kg.

Previously, he'd selected export heifers mostly based on their weight and size. This meant the later-born calves were often the ones culled.

At other times, he'd try to predict their genetic merit based on their dam and sire. But Andrew understood this wasn't the most accurate way to cull heifers and he feared his highest genetic merit offspring – or those with the best Balanced Performance Index (BPI) – could have been sold.

Seeking more clarity about selection tools he attended the Genomics at a Glance session run by WestVic Dairy and DatatGene in December.

In January he decided to genomic test some young heifers.

The results for these heifers were returned quickly and he was able to rank them based on BPI and some specific traits he personally liked.

From here he removed the bottom 45 heifers and offered them to the export market.

Within a couple of months, they were tagged and awaiting pick-up for the export boat.

"Genomics just offered that little bit more information to give me that security with my decision," Andrew said.

"It's not that different to what I was doing last year – selecting heifers for export – but now I have a little more information to give me confidence that I'm selecting the best possible animals to keep here."

For Andrew, breeding additional livestock has become a regular part of his family's business.

Farming with his wife Kellie and their family– he understands the value of livestock and how he can utilise new breeding tools to maximise his investment.

With export cattle sales providing an additional income stream, Andrew said he will continue to use genomic testing to ensure he retains his high genetic merit heifers as replacements.

Into the future, Andrew believes there's a role for genomic information when it comes to joining heifers and cows.

"More information is gold," he said. "It makes it easier to make a better decision."

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