



Calving Ease ABV for Holsteins

Breeding for a simpler calving

Key points

- Improved calving ease has animal health and welfare benefits and cost savings for dairy businesses.
- Dairy farmers now have more Holstein bulls to choose from if they want to ensure their cows and heifers calve easier.
- Genotyped cows also receive a Calving Ease ABV.
- The model used for the Calving Ease Australian Breeding Value (ABV) was updated in April 2020 to include genomics.



To improve the Calving Ease from this mating, select bulls with a Calving Ease ABV of at least 103.

If a cow has a Calving Ease ABV less than 95, join her with bulls that have Calving Ease ABV greater than 105.

Improving calving ease

The risks of calving difficulty can be reduced by good management, such as rearing well-grown heifers. Selection and breeding strategies can also reduce the incidence of calving difficulty in both the short and long term.

Joining a cow or heifer to a bull whose progeny are born more “easily” than the average, is a way to reduce calving difficulty and improve health and animal welfare. An easy calving also helps cows through a seamless transition into lactation.

Breeding for easier calvings

An animal’s Calving Ease ABV reflects the ease by its calves are born. It is not a measure of how easily its daughters will calve. This means a bull’s Calving Ease ABV is most relevant for the calving outcome from a specific mating (rather than long term genetic gain).

Calving Ease ABV is expressed as a percentage of normal or easier calvings in mature cows. The higher the number, the easier the calving. The average is 100.

Bulls in the top 10% for calving ease have an ABV of 103 or more.

The Calving Ease ABV is not included in the Balanced Performance Index (BPI) or other Australian indices.

What to do?

To improve the Calving Ease from this mating, select bulls with a Calving Ease ABV of at least 103. If breeding replacements from this mating, use a Good Bull (high BPI).

If a cow has a Calving Ease ABV less than 95, join her with bulls that have Calving Ease ABV greater than 105.

What does the updated ABV mean for farmers?

It’s easier than ever to select Holstein animals for Calving Ease and dairy farmers have a larger choice of quality bulls which can reduce calving stress in their herd. There’s more choice and improved reliability giving farmers more confidence.



Good Bulls
Bull choices made easy

Reliability

Reliability is a measure of confidence in an ABV. The higher the reliability the greater the confidence.

With the 2020 updated model, the reliability of the Calving Ease ABV for a young, genomic bull is about 60%. This figure goes up to 90% for a bull with 100 calves born and recorded.

For heifers with genomics, the average reliability is 59%, which is 20% higher than the reliability without genomics.

Calving reports

Calving reports provided by Australian dairy farmers contribute to the Calving Ease ABV. Farmers assess the level of difficulty associated with the birth of a calf bull. Farmers rate a birth from No Difficulty to High Difficulty, depending on the level of assistance or complications associated with the calving. Calving reports also include a score for the size of the calf which contributes to the Calving Ease ABV.

Other breeds

The Calving Ease ABV is only published for Holsteins. The Jersey breed has significantly fewer calving ease issues. There is not enough data available to calculate calving ease for other breeds at this stage.

Acknowledgment

DataGene is an initiative of Dairy Australia and the herd improvement industry. DairyBio provides the research pipeline to develop and maintain Australian Breeding Values.

More information

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