Your genetic plan.



LIMOUSIN

Carcase, Yield, Efficiency.



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making a genetic plan.

In the world of extensive agriculture, ruminants play an amazing role of performing when times are good and surviving when times are not so good. In the majority of situations, our animals are managed in high numbers and where labour is scarce and expensive. They can go for long periods of time without a lot of human intervention.

Often when we think about buying in new genetics, we think about selecting for the things that make us more money. Selecting for higher productivity. However, it is important to also consider that a lot of the things that cost us money or take us time managing our animals are also under some genetic control.

So as you think about the rams, bulls, ewes or cows that you will be buying this season, think not only about those that will produce the biggest cheque, think also about those that will have you writing less cheques, and spending less time.

This booklet is designed to help guide you through the four key aspects of a genetic plan:

1. The things that make you money
2. The things that save you money
3. The things that save you time
4. The things that delight your customer



It goes without saying, but...

The environments that sheep and beef cattle run in vary hugely across the world. Equally the prevailing markets differ considerably between areas. There is no way that a single animal type is perfect across all of these situations. Every situation is different. Add to this fact that we all have our preference in the type of animals we like to farm, and there is no surprise the variety we see in sheep and beef cattle across the world. It is important to remember that it is not about breeding THE perfect animal, it is about breeding YOUR perfect animal.

Within your enterprise you will be buying animals for different tasks, it is very worthwhile having a genetic plan for each of these different tasks. The main purchases you make will be for bulls, the rest of this document focuses on these.

For this Genetic Plan:

I'm buying bulls

To be used:

- ☐ for heifers
- ☐ as terminals (all progeny sold)
- ☐ to breed replacements

You should only have one tick for these boxes.

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THINGS THAT MAKE YOU MONEY

Heavier, faster, more...

Traditionally when we think about genetics, these are the things that we think of first. Finding the animals that will produce more product, or a higher value product without additional inputs. This is an opportunity to really think about the things that make you the most money. It will differ considerably across regions and even between neighbours. It is very tightly linked to your enterprise focus and the type of sheep and/or cattle you are running. Try hard to get it down to the thing you actually get paid for. For example, weaner sales might be your main income, but you actually get paid on both the number sold and their weight, so the actual attributes are weaning weight and reproductive rate. In the white boxes below list the TWO things that are most important to your annual income. There may well be other (less important) things that impact on your income, record them in the boxes to the right.

Attributes that MAKE money for the business:

What are the 2 things that are most important for income?

1.
2.

Are there other things important for income?

1.
2.
3.

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THINGS THAT SAVE YOU MONEY

The battle against the cost-price squeeze

We are all too familiar with the increasing costs of running an extensive livestock business. Some of these costs are independent of the animals. However, changing the genetics of the animals we manage can have a profound impact on the costs involved in managing them. There is genetic variation in how animals respond to diseases, parasites, and sub-optimal nutrition.

Most things that cost you money also take your time. On this page, try and list things that more weighted to a monetary cost rather than time. An example of this is stock losses. There might be a bit of time dealing with the dead animal but in the main, the cost to the business is the loss of that productive animal. Calf survival is another example.

In the left boxes below list the TWO things that are most important to your annual expenses for the stock class you are writing this plan for. There may well be other (less important attributes) that impact on your profit, record them in the boxes to the right.

Attributes that SAVE money for the business:

What are the 2 things that are most important for reducing costs?

1.

2.

Are there other things important for reducing costs?

1.

2.

3.

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THINGS THAT SAVE YOU TIME

Precious time

I've never heard anyone on a farm say that they are bored and are looking for things to do! There are always more jobs to be done than there is time available. Some of these jobs are unavoidable, but when it comes to managing livestock, some animals have the genetic potential to look after themselves and some need room service. Breeding animals that require less labour inputs to stay healthy and productive has so many flow on benefits for the business and the animals. Most things that take you time, also cost you money. On this page, try and list things that more weighted to taking extra time rather than a monetary cost. An example of this is feet health in sheep, the actual costs of zinc for the footbath is minimal compared to the hours of mustering and handling required to get animals treated and inspected.

In the white boxes below, list the TWO things that are most important to your annual expenses for the stock class you are writing this plan for. There may well be other (less important things) that impact on your profit, record them in the right boxes.

Attributes that save TIME for the business:

What are the 2 things that are most important for reducing time required?

1.

2.

Are there other things important for reducing the time required?

1.

2.

3.

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THINGS THAT DELIGHT A CONSUMER.

The consumer is king

Ultimately, our extensive ruminant systems will only remain sustainable and relevant if we keep our consumers front of mind. We must always ensure that their experience consuming our products is a good one. For meat, this means making sure it tastes great every time. The other aspect is making sure that we farm in a way that they can be proud of. Increasingly this means removing as many chemical and physical interventions from livestock management as is practical. Incorporating attributes that either enhance the consumer experience or support a great product back-story is an important part of future-focussed genetic plan. We should aim to delight our customers, not just meet their needs.

In the boxes below, list the TWO attributes that would be important to the end consumer of your products. There may well be other (less important attributes) that impact consumer acceptance of your products and your profit, record them in the right boxes.

Attributes that delight your consumer:

What are the 2 things that are most important for your end-consumers?

1.

2.

Are there other things important for your end consumers?

1.

2.

3.

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YOUR GENETIC PLAN.

Bringing it all together

A balanced genetic plan is about incorporating attributes across the four key areas this document has focussed on. Another key aspect of a genetic plan is the ability to actually achieve genetic gain across the attributes identified. It is therefore important to not have too many attributes to focus on, particularly if you are a commercial producer and not breeding bulls. Now is the opportunity to distill down exactly which attributes you want in your plan.

Genetic plan for: *Write business name here*

Sire team: *eg. Terminal bulls, Heifer bulls etc*

Person responsible: *Name*

Effective from: *Start date eg. today's date*

Within each of the four areas, review the things that you have listed and in the boxes below enter the single most important thing from each group. There is also the option of adding a fifth thing from any area that is important to you. It will mean you have two things from one of the areas.

The most important attributes for:

Money making

Money saving

Time saving

Happy consumers

Wild card

Pick an additional thing from any of the lists

Other things to watch:

There are things that don't easily fit into any category. These may be your preference for what an animal should look like. They may be associated with experience of an animal type that works best for the farm. If there are visual type attributes that are important to you but haven't been captured above, write them here:

1.

2.

3.

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YOUR GENETIC PLAN.

Making it happen

You've distilled down exactly what is important to you. Now is the time to think about what you are going to do to turn the plan into genetic gain and ultimately money.

When thinking about the strategy you are going to take to maximise the amount of genetic gain you are making, you need to carefully consider the difference between the phenotype and the genotype of your animals and those that you are purchasing. What you see isn't always what you get.

What I will do to make improvement:

Mature age cow policy. Which of the older cows will get culled?

1.

2.

Replacement heifer policy. Which of the young heifers get retained for breeding?

1.

2.

Replacement Sire policy. What will you do when you are buying or selecting bulls?

1.

2.

Data collection policy. Is there additional data you will collect to help inform future decisions?

1.

2.

Make sure you share this plan with all of the relevant people in your business. Genetic gain is about making good decisions on a consistent basis. It is also about minimising the amount of error in the decisions we make about which animals to select. Most farmers get to make these decisions about 30 times in their farming careers. Make them count.

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If you'd like support, from us and like-minded farmers, with implementing this plan and turning it into real genetic gain, please email or talk to us about on-farm options.

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