

Hakuna Matata...

Hakuna Matata is a Swahili phrase, made famous by a Disney movie. Literally translated it means, "there are no worries here".

As I've stated before, perhaps the greatest privilege in my job is meeting so many people and seeing the many different perspectives on how to produce and market cattle. Over time I have noticed a trend that is strongly supported by research and census data. There are fewer farmers and by and large they either have more cows, or work off farm, or both. These farmers are also getting older.

Take a minute to reflect on your own customers. Do you have more or fewer customers than 5 years ago? Do they buy more bulls on average? Are they older on average than they were 5 or 10 years ago? As we are nearing the end of bull sale season we hope that the bulls we have sold fulfill the hakuna matata theory of life. This means that cattle are matched into the right situation, and this may be the true value of a seedstock producer to their commercial customer base.

There are several tools available to Simmental breeders, as well as some that are under development to create no worry cattle.

The first is EPD for calving ease and maternal calving ease. These EPD are built using data reported by Simmental breeders and are driven by birthweight and calving ease scores. Higher values indicate easier calving. Maternal calving ease reflects the ability of first calf heifers from a sire to calve unassisted. This is extremely important for customers who are retaining heifers and for making sure those heifers breed back.

Simmental breeders also have the opportunity to report udder scores on females at calving, as well as calf vigour and mothering ability scores. While we are still building the database, these are all traits that are identified by membership and their customers as being important to "no worry" cattle. Ensuring calves are born without assistance and that they can get up and suck on their own has always been important, but it even more so in a world where the producer may be away from home during the calving event.

Other important data that membership can report includes docility scores on cows at calving and on calves at weaning. A lot of work has been conducted on docility and it is a relatively highly heritable trait. As Simmental breeders build the dataset of temperament scores, breeders will be able to select for quieter cattle. Remember, those larger herds, and older customer base? Quiet cattle are a must for these producers. There is also a lot of supporting research that shows quiet cattle gain faster, have reduced disease occurrence and are more tender when harvested.

As this new information reaches a critical mass (enough breeders, reporting enough records), it becomes possible to look at the genetic component of these traits, and also at how they may impact profitability. Canadian Simmental are unique within North America for the ability to record these traits.

As with all traits, complete reporting of the convenience traits (I would argue essential traits) is important. For example, failing to report cows with poor udder scores means that those with the best

udders may appear relatively average within the cowherd. Failing to report pulls, means that there may be no variation in calving ease scores within a group and the data cannot be used for genetic evaluation.

As we think about current and evolving customers for Simmental genetics the future looks exciting. The genetic trends within the Canadian population for the traits we report EPD on are certainly headed in the right direction. As well, we see strong and growing bull sales across the country. In the long term this can only be accomplished by trouble free cattle. Getting a handle on the traits that create problem free cattle must remain a top priority for Simmental breeders.

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Information on the scoring systems is available on the CSA website, by contacting the office directly, or on the inside of the CSA calving books. While not all of the scoring systems result in an EPD, it can be useful to review on a herd basis to see if bloodlines or sire trends emerge.