



Executive Secretary  
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# THOUGHTS

## From The Secretary

### *Growth is the choice.*

In researching for an article that we wrote for *The Progressive Dairyman* we came upon some interesting statistics in relation to registrations of the six dairy breeds in 1950. Can you rank the breeds in 1950 from top to bottom for registrations? The answer may surprise you.

All breeds face choices, to grow registrations, maintain registrations or decrease registrations. To grow semen sales, to maintain semen sales or decrease semen sales. To expand the percentage of the national herd, to maintain their share of the National herd, to decrease their share of the National population. The only way to ensure the long-term value of our cattle is to increase demand for both cows and semen. In the last decade, Brown Swiss has shown that we believe in growth. Growth from expanding interest in our breed into new herds, growth by improving the profitability of the great Brown Swiss cow, growth by addressing issues facing the Brown Swiss cow.

By not taking action to be more competitive, to not continuously seek out ways to improve, a breed makes a choice to decrease their numbers. I would suggest that no breed makes that choice. We cannot make the mistake of assuming that other breeds are complacent with their place in the national herd. All seek to improve their cattle for all markets. We must be ever mindful of our relative ranking compared to our competition. In the last issue I wrote about the accomplishments of our tanbark warriors. I believe that the Brown Swiss cows high status on the shavings is a direct result of Brown Swiss breeders embracing the strategic vision to make her more competitive; in other words, while maintaining breed character you have chosen to improve her by modifying your selection criteria of sires.

Those inclined to the commercial path have also aggressively used the appropriate selection tools to improve the commercial competitiveness of the Brown Swiss. This includes both Brown Swiss breeders and AI geneticists. Over time selection of young bulls based on the genetic selection tool of Parent Average (PA) has proven the most reliable path to developing those sires that will more readily increase profitable production. The higher the Parent Average for Net Merit of a set of young bulls, the higher the average genetic evaluations of those same bulls when they attain their proofs.

This is an important point. Pedigrees do matter, for type or production, in predicting how a bull's daughters will perform. What we fail to recall at times, is that these averages are part of a bell curve; not every bull will prove

out on the average for his pedigree but that a large enough sampling of bulls will come close to the average PA. This means that within any set of full brothers, let alone a combination of sampling sires, there will be a range of results above, below and right on the PA.

Two of the most famous full brothers with an extensive worldwide sampling are Forest Lawn Simon Jetway-ET (M) and his brother Forest Lawn Simn Jupiter-ET \*TM. It should be noted, that Jetway's proof includes 18% US daughters while Jupiter has 1% US daughters. By the highly influential Top Acres Elegant Simon the brothers were of course out of the remarkable Idyl Wild Improver Jinx (M). For type Jetway brought open ribbed, uphill walking daughters with lots of dairy elegance that needed a bit of protection for udder cleft and depth. Jupiter produced smaller framed cows lacking the skeletal extension of Jetway but with higher, wider, tighter udders with a stronger cleft and more correct teat placement. Jetway is +0.9 for final score while Jupiter is +0.3. In production Jupiter holds the edge with a current +465m +22f +5p compared to Jetway's +171m +3f -3p. In management traits Jupiter is +3.8 for Productive Life (PL), 2.59 for Somatic Cell (SCS) and -1.2 for Daughter Pregnancy Rate (DPR). Jetway is -1.8 for PL, stands at 3.00 for SCS and is -3.1 for DPR. In terms of PPR Jupiter is +91 and Jetway is -13.

The current Parent Average for these two influential bulls is -311m -8f -9p. For type their PA is +0.3. For the management traits the PA for PL is +1.9, for SCS 2.86 and for DPR -0.8 giving them a PA of -1 PPR. On the type front Jupiter hits the PA while Jetway far exceeds the pedigree prediction. On production Jupiter is above the PA. Combined with his management traits this puts Jupiter quite a bit above the PA for PPR. Jetway is actually above on pure production but with the inclusion of his udder and management traits, which are considerably below the PA, Jetway's PPR is a bit under the PA.

These two bulls exemplify what can be expected out of any set or group of bulls relative to their PAs. If our sample size was large enough, perhaps 100 full brothers being tested, all their numbers combined would come very close to their PA. However, individual bulls will be spread out over a range. What is important to remember is that the higher the PA the higher the expected average of the bulls being proven. If we sample young sires whose PA's average +0 PPR they will average, as a group, less than a group of young sires whose PA's average +150 PPR when their own genetic evaluations arrive. In turn, a group of young bulls whose PA's average +300 PPR will, on

average, have higher genetic evaluations when their own daughter's start producing than the bulls whose PPR PA is +150 or +0.

Another thing that we need to be mindful of is what I mentioned in the third paragraph above in regards to other breeds. We may be comfortable with a +50 PPR, or +150NMS in terms of young sires we are developing for the Brown Swiss breed. We would feel that relative to the breed we are making progress. The more important question is are we making progress relative to the dairy industry as a whole? Breeds with larger population sizes and hence larger sampling bases maybe able to sample a set of young bulls that would, if converted to our PPR average +150 and in terms of Net Merit they could average +350NMS.

Relative to each other, what breed will make the most rapid genetic improvement? If a breed is lower than Brown Swiss in lifetime profitability but has higher averages for selection they could catch up and past our level of lifetime profitability even as we improve. If a breed is ahead in terms of lifetime profitability they will gain a further advantage. Either is not in our best interest for breed growth OR to increase the value of our great Brown Swiss cow.

In 1950 the breed that was, in terms of relative national herd size, in sixth and last place was Brown Swiss. By 1995 we had attained our current ranking in relative herd size of third. Our registrations in the last five years have shown an increase on the long-term curve and our semen sales continue to increase. The multi-breed genetic evaluations allows us to increase sire sampling. Dr. DeChow's research has shown the possibilities of Brown Swiss crossbreds and the genomics project promises to improve our selection ability. Further, the New Generation Brown Swiss Foundation Smart Calf research project continues and we have modified our score card to address concerns with fertility/longevity. In addition, we are looking at ways to increase Brown Swiss numbers at South Dakota State University so that more Brown Swiss can be included in basic research. We as a breed our making the choice for improvement and growth.

However, that improvement for growth must also include production. That improvement must not only be considered in terms of the Brown Swiss breed, but the entire dairy industry. I wrote last month that we as a breed must realize that our competition is not other Brown Swiss breeders. This month I am adding that our opportunities are those dairy producers who as of yet do not have the Brown cow with the low somatic cell on their farm...Dave