Informing New Zealand Beef (INZB)

Quarterly Progress Report: October – December 2022

Background

Beef + Lamb New Zealand with the support of Ministry for Primary Industries is leading the Informing New Zealand Beef (INZB) programme. The overall aim of the seven-year programme is to improve profitability and enhance sustainability across the beef industry through the development and adoption of improved genetics.
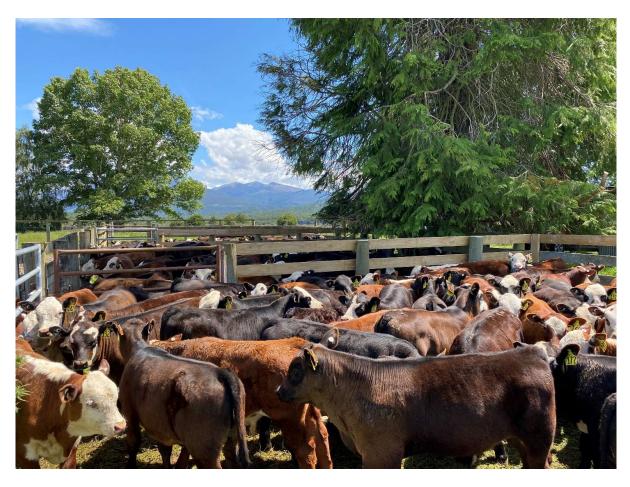
The objectives of the programme are to:

1. develop a beef genetic evaluation system that includes traits that are important to NZ beef farmers and supports a sustainable beef farming industry in NZ,
2. create easy to use tools which enable data to be efficiently collected, managed, analysed and used by farmers to make profitable decisions for their operation,
3. create a new approach to extension design with the goal of increasing farmer engagement across the beef industry.

Summary of progress during this quarter

Artificial Insemination (AI) carried out at Kepler

Beef Progeny Test Project Lead, Anna Boyd, alongside Xcell Breeding Services and Kepler farm staff artificially inseminated a total of 405 cows to Hereford and Angus bulls in December, 2022. The sires included 13 bulls selected from Angus and Hereford breeders across the country, an international Angus bull and link sires used in the 2021 mating. Semen from these bulls will also be used at Lochinver in January, alongside 4 Simmental bulls. Our second cohort (2022 born) of Kepler AI-sired calves were born in September/October and have been weighed, tagged and DNA-sampled at marking.

Call for expressions of interest for commercial farmers

In year 2, eleven commercial farmers were onboarded into the programme. This quarter, an Expressions of Interest (EOI) was used to identify further commercial farmers to join the programme. Our goal is to onboard at least 10 commercial farmers a year, and we were fortunate to have more than 50 EOI submitted. This is a further indicator of the increasing support for the programme and a validation that the premise of this programme around expanding the sources of data into genetic evaluations is of interest to many in industry. We are currently working through these submissions and assessing the suitability for best fit with the programme's objectives. The strong interest from commercial farmers will lead us to consider how we might scale up the on-boarding of farmers to collect and contribute data into the nProve evaluation system.

Appointment of Project Lead for the Commercial Herd project

Sonya Shaw will join the INZB team in February, as Project Lead for the Commercial Herds project. Sonya is a qualified vet and has worked in the agricultural industry for the past 20 years, where she's had extensive experience working with farmers. She comes to us from OSPRI, where she was the bovine tuberculosis (Tb) Case Manager for the Northern South Island and Veterinarian Disease Manager for the Upper South Island. The team is looking forward to working with Sonya as her skills and expertise will be a real asset to the programme.

Better Beef Breeding online learning module available via B+LNZ Knowledge Hub

The Better Beef Breeding online learning module has been completed and is now available on Beef + Lamb New Zealand's Knowledge Hub. The module includes short videos from two commercial beef farmers, who share their experiences setting breeding objectives and using EBVs for bull selection. The interactive module allows farmers and their teams to better understand the role of genetics when purchasing bulls. The module is available here.

Initial extension design research carried out with farmers

The first step in the extension design work is a "discovery" phase. This involves interviewing commercial farmers and farming units to identify their views on genetics and the uptake of genetic tools. This will help determine what extension delivery strategies are the most effective. Fifteen interviews with farmers have now taken place and the Extension Design team are working to consolidate the insights gathered from these interviews. The team is very appreciative of the time given and interest shown in the programme by the interviewees.

Annual industry survey for programme assessment carried out

Each year during the programme, we ask beef farmers, stud breeders and rural professionals for their views about beef genetics and available tools in the industry. This survey helps us measure the changes in views and the uptake of genetic tools in the industry over time. The survey went out mid-December and results will be available in January 2023.

Key highlights and achievements

- Artificial Insemination carried out at Kepler
- Appointment of Project Lead for the Commercial Herd project
- Better Beef Breeding Online learning module produced and launched
- 15 in-depth farmer interviews were conducted to help inform future extension delivery

Upcoming

- INZB has a new staff member joining us in February – Sonya Shaw will oversee the Commercial Herd project
- Begin onboarding more commercial farmers (at least 10) based on Expressions of Interest
- Artificial Insemination at Lochinver Station

Investment

Investment period	Co-investor contribution	MPI contribution	Total investment
During this Quarter	$312,461	$208,307	$520,768
Programme To Date	$2.00 m	$1.33 m	$3.33 m