



Informing New Zealand Beef (INZB)

Quarterly Progress Report: January – March 2024

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

Feedback sought from Industry and Technical Advisory Groups on prototype selection indexes

AbacusBio have worked closely with key B+LNZ staff to develop prototype index models for maternal, terminal and dairy-beef systems. In March, the economic model backing these indexes, as well as the indexes, were presented to the Industry and Technical Advisory Groups to get their input. Their feedback was sought on methodology, trait weightings within the indexes and selection responses.

Feedback from these advisory groups has been taken on board and finalisation of the indexes is underway.

Lochinver Beef Progeny Test Field Day a success

Over 80 people attended our recent Beef Progeny Test (BPT) Field Day at Lochinver Station.

Lochinver, which is run by Rimani Farms' Business Manager Steve Smith, is one of two host farms for the Informing New Zealand Beef programme's across-breed Progeny Test, the other is Pāmu's Kepler Farm near Manapouri.

The day included a mix of Progeny Test updates, a farm tour, in-field presentations and a beef class structural assessment demonstration.

New trait development work is underway

There are lots of exciting things happening in the INZB programme when it comes to new trait development. The current focus is on fertility, Body Condition Scoring (BCS) and udder scoring.

Anna Boyd, B+LNZ Beef Genetics Specialist, and Dr Jason Archer, INZB Science Lead, ran four BCS and udder scoring workshops for breeders in February – two in the South Island and two in the North Island. These workshops covered the theory of measuring both traits and also involved getting in the yard to body condition score cows. In addition to this, a 'how-to' video on Body Condition Scoring has been made available on the B+LNZ's Knowledge Hub (<https://beeflambnz.com/knowledge-hub/video/body-condition-scoring-beef-cows>).

The fertility trait trial is progressing well on two pilot farms. Yearling heifers and rebreeding heifers were tagged with CowManager tags in November last year at these two sites. Throughout mating, tags were used to determine cycling dates (heat events predicted from activity, rumination and eating time). Foetal age scanning has since been carried out on both farms and this data will be used to validate fertility data from the ear tags. This data is currently being analysed to determine next steps.

Beef Progeny Test (BPT) activities

Artificial Insemination (AI) was carried out at the Lochinver Beef Progeny Test site in January. Angus cows were AI'd to the same Hereford and Angus bulls used at the Kepler mating, as well as 4 Simmental bulls.

At the Kepler BPT site, all BPT females were pregnancy scanned. Yet again, success to artificial insemination (AI) was fantastic, with 65.4% of the 2019-born and 58.9% of the 2020-born cows in-calf to AI sires.

INZB survey finds increased uptake of genetic tools among farmers

The INZB programme's progress is measured annually through running an industry survey. Beef farmers, stud breeders and rural professionals are asked for their views on beef genetics and available tools in the industry. With the survey being run annually, we can measure the changes in views and obtain indicators of the uptake of genetic tools in the industry over time.

The first survey was run in December 2021, providing a baseline level of data. In late 2023 we ran the third survey and results have been analysed and compared against results from previous years.

Some key findings of the 2023 survey include:

- A significant majority of the farmers responding to the survey want to be able to compare bulls across breeds.
- Overall, there appears to be an increase in awareness of INZB tools, a rise in understanding of the numbers and science behind beef genetics and the ability to apply genetic tools (e.g. use EBVs or indexes) on farm. There is also a continued belief in the use of genetics. Extension and ensuring industry uptake of the tools required to drive genetic progress is an integral part of the INZB programme and so these findings are encouraging.

Key highlights and achievements

- Lochinver Beef Progeny Test field day held
- Prototype selection indexes presented to INZB Industry and Technical Advisory Groups
- Artificial insemination at Lochinver BPT site
- BCS and udder scoring workshops held for breeders
- Body Condition Scoring 'how-to' video released
- A further 16 commercial farmers onboarded to the programme

Upcoming

- Regional Better Beef Breeding workshops
- Independent mid-term review of the INZB programme
- INZB commercial farmer meeting

Investment

Investment period	Co-investor contribution	MPI contribution	Total investment
During this Quarter	\$463,539	\$309,026	\$772,566
Programme To Date	\$3.80m	\$2.53m	\$6.33m