

An Invitation to participate in “Dairy Crossing”

By Dr. Ted Burnside and Dr. Gary Rogers

Dear Colleagues and Dairy Crossbreeding Enthusiasts:

We welcome you to our new website “Dairy Crossing” www.dairycrossbreeding.com! This site is dedicated to presenting educational material on breed crossing for dairy cattle. Our website is sponsored and financed by Geno Global, an export company wholly owned by Geno, a farmer-owned cooperative AI breeding company which runs the only dairy breeding program in Norway for a national dairy cow herd of about 250,000 cows.

This website will strive to fairly appraise what is written and said by all sources about the theory and practice of crossbreeding in dairy herds, including different breeds and what they can contribute towards breed crossing, and will invite dairy farmers and dairy scientists to bring their experience and information to the website to share with others. It will strive to comment fairly on all that is published but reserves the right to deny publication of material that the Editors, Dr. Gary Rogers (who is also currently Editor-in-Chief for the Journal of Dairy Science) and yours truly, believe to have no scientific or practical merit!

Let us begin with the understanding that dairy Crossbreeding is in its infancy today in addressing the critical needs of the 21st century commercial dairy enterprise and that it will grow to be the breeding program of choice for many or most commercial dairy operations. The commercial dairy industry has already begun to enunciate to progressive AI dairy breeding companies and breeders of purebred dairy cattle the desired traits to be put into selection goals and how much attention each of these traits should receive. In shaping the future directions for selection, the commercial industry tends to ignore the shows, since it desires a medium – sized cow, focuses on udder attachments, mid- rib strength, teat placement and length, and the all-important feet and legs as these may indicate the ability of the cow to move around in paddock or pasture or on concrete. Rump structure in relation to calving and reproduction and evidence of adequate fleshing to ensure the lactating cow will breed back fast are now “must-haves” for progressive, commercial dairy farmers.

We hope that many breeding companies of today will have the vision to rework their breeding goals and selection policies to focus more on cow health, fertility and other traits that are critical to profitable commercial dairy performance. Time will tell if all the existing breeds will persist or if some will essentially decline to only a small population designed for maintaining diversity. The long term survival of some breeds will largely depend on the willingness of the breeding organizations to respond to the changes in direction that commercial herds and their crossbreeding programs require.

In the meantime we intend that this website will help to propel progressive industry leaders along the path of breed crossing and toward the development of breeds or breed crosses that have practical merit for commercial dairy herds. The ultimate aim is to put into the hands of the commercial dairy farmer the genetic material that will result in highly profitable commercial dairy herds! We need breeds for crossing that have been aggressively selected for that purpose.

In another document on this site, I will tell you in more detail about the history of the Norwegian cattle breeding initiative that has run since the 1950's. Suffice it to say at the outset, that it is unique in that the original cow population of 500,000 chiefly Norwegian Red Breed (NRF) cows was allocated to one scientifically-designed cattle breeding program when the Norwegian farmers eliminated all 10 dairy herd books and joined the scientists in designing a breeding program, an AI and performance recording system, and a unified breeding goal! The program and breeding goal focused on increased production, improved health of the cow, improved fertility of cows and sires, improved calving ease and decreased stillbirths, and improved conformation. Selection for improved conformation focused on udders, feet and legs, and size and growth rates of the cow and calves -- all in relation to the cow's utility, well-being and survival.

The net result of 50+ years of intensive selection for superior fertility and health is a Norwegian Red (NR) cow that complements the Holstein, Brown Swiss, Ayrshire, Jersey, Guernsey, Milking Shorthorn and other global dairy breeds. Conversely, over the same period of 50 + years most dairy breeds were selected largely for very high production and show ring conformation or type.

We welcome your visits to our "Dairy Crossing" website. If you are a commercial dairy farmer and wish to actively participate, you can become a participating member of this website by providing our readership with a snapshot of your herd as it is today, in terms of breeding goals, breed distribution, production levels, health and fertility indicators, size of herd and your location and contact information. Others who wish to participate can let our readers know about their academic or practical experience in dairy cattle breeding. Readers can make their own judgments about the input of participants based on the active participants' backgrounds! Let us hear from you!

Sincerely,

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