

A Seedstock Producer's Perspective on MateSel



In a breeding operation, there's big decisions that need to be made on an annual basis, one of which is deciding the sires that will be joined to specific mobs of females. Jeanne Seifert and Ian Stark, the owners of Seifert Belmont Reds based at Jandowae on the Western Darling Downs, have collectively undertaken this decision-making process for ten years on 1500 - 1700 females/year. In recent years however they've explored the use of MateSel, a tool offered by ABRI that helps to objectively optimise mating allocations. TBTS Technical Officer, Tim Emery, recently caught up with Jeanne to gain an insight into their experience with MateSel.



Jeanne Seifert and Ian Stark, Seifert Belmont Reds, have been using MateSel since 2018 to do their mating allocations.

Q: How have you typically done your mating allocations?

I've typically used the BREEDPLAN filtering system to identify males in the Top 10 - 20% for the particular traits we are focusing on, which may change from year to year, but commonly Days to Calving, Scrotal Size, Growth, Eye Muscle Area and Marbling. For some groups I've also identified females who are weaker for certain traits and matched them with complimentary bulls.

Q: How long would this normally take to do?

It takes me weeks.

Q: When did you first use MateSel?

2018

Q: How many groups of females have you used it for?

Two groups in 2018 and four groups in 2019.

Q: Have you used all the available breeding strategies (Genetic Diversity, Balanced or High Gain) or focused on one in particular?

In 2018, we used it for yearling mated heifers so we generated a suggested mating list of low birth weight sires and went for a 'Balanced' breeding strategy. In 2019 we once again chose the 'Balanced' breeding strategy and used it on 1st calf heifers, along with other young females under five years of age.

Q: Approximately how long did it take you to fill in the MateSel Template?

I go back and revisit my choices a fair bit with respect to groups of females, and sires that we propose for each group, so it takes me a couple of hours over a few days.

Q: Approximately how long did it take to get your MateSel Report back?

The technicians aim to turn a run around within 48 hours, and our reports were gratefully returned within this timeframe. In 2019, we pre-arranged when the run was to be done so the technician knew it was coming in and we found the speed

at which the information was returned was outstanding. We literally had the cows and calves in the yards and could draft accordingly. It was an unusual set of circumstances and we certainly won't expect same day service every year.

Q: Was the MateSel Report self-explanatory or did you reach out to Technical Staff for further explanation?

The concept is self-explanatory but I did contact technical staff for further clarification and advice. I also reached out for minor assistance whilst completing the template.

Q: Can you offer any advice to new users of the tool?

By submitting a bigger population of females, there's a greater potential to make genetic improvement.

Q: Do you see yourself using MateSel for future joinings?

Absolutely yes!

Q: Any other comments you'd like to make about your experience with using MateSel in your seedstock operation?

The capability of the tool is beyond what mere mortals can do. It is a fast and effective tool for driving genetic improvement within a herd. The producer can still be in the steering seat to whatever degree they wish, and can be very specific about the initial selection of males and females they submit to MateSel. Alternatively, a producer can submit all available sires and every female in their herd and let MateSel do it all.

Seedstock producers in Australia who are members of a breed society with a published Selection Index are encouraged to consider using the MateSel mating optimisation tool when planning their upcoming joinings. If you are interested in learning more about MateSel, you can visit the BREEDPLAN website, contact the MateSel technician at matesel@breedplan.une.edu.au or contact staff at SBTS or TBTS.