Genetic gains name of the game

Funded by the MLA Donor Company, 14 breed associations and the Agricultural Business Research Institute, SBTS has been the backbone of genetics progress in southern cattle herds.

The project has helped producers apply research outcomes from the Beef CRC, supported BREEDPLAN, and developed numerous genetic selection tools, indexes and information resources.

Genetic gains
SBTS project manager Alex McDonald said the project’s greatest achievement was helping southern beef breeders improve their herds’ rate of genetic gain – an achievement that has benefited every beef producer.

“The project’s original objective was to increase the weighted selection index by $15/cow mated from the base year of 2008 to 2013,” he said.

“This has been exceeded by 22%, to $18.33/cow mated/year.”

This has meant the average weighted change in selection index trends of the southern seedstock sector has effectively doubled during the five years of the project.

Index support
SBTS may not be a well-known entity, but its extensive technological and extension support has affected almost every southern beef-producing enterprise.

A major role of its team is to maintain and update the 32 selection indexes for the 14 stakeholder breeds, including Angus, Hereford, Shorthorn, Limousin, Red Angus, Charolais, Murray Grey, Simmental, South Devon and Wagyu.

Boosting BREEDPLAN
In addition to number-crunching, SBTS continues to provide technical support to breed societies for software upgrades, development of new genetic selection tools and the integration of new Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs).

As each breed has been moved to the new International Livestock Registry 2 (ILR2) database, they receive monthly genetic analyses instead of receiving them only once or twice a year.

The Gelbvieh and Blonde d’Aquitaine breed societies have most recently moved to monthly group BREEDPLAN analyses and are now able to produce enhanced BREEDPLAN reports.

Alex said SBTS promoted the Beef Information Nucleus programs for Angus, Charolais, Limousin and Wagyu and continues to assist in the development of new EBVs for various breeds (see story on page 26).

“Recent times we helped implement Calving Ease Direct and Calving Ease Daughters EBV analysis and publication for Red Angus and Docility EBVs for Hereford and Simmental,” he said.

Extension
SBTS has been helping breeders make more informed bull-buying decisions through their BullSELECT workshops.

During the past five years, 23 workshops have been held, attracting 470 breeders who gained a better understanding of the genetic information and selection tools available.

Other work by SBTS staff includes on-farm consultations, delivering workshops, creating a library of webinars and developing a host of other online information, such as the SBTS Update and monthly TechTalk articles.

“We use social media as an additional communication stream for genetic technology updates including Twitter, Facebook and the SBTS and Tropical Breeds Technology Services YouTube Channel for uploading recorded webinars and videos,” Alex said.

“Presently, we have 40 videos on YouTube relating to genetic technologies for the beef industry.”