An exciting new benchmarking tool is now available to beef seedstock producers known as TakeStock. TakeStock collates all available BREEDPLAN and Selection Index information to provide beef cattle breeders with a tool that enables them to assess and improve the rate of genetic progress in their herd.

**What does TakeStock do?**

TakeStock uses the pedigree and performance information that each herd has recorded with BREEDPLAN to:

- Provide a range of statistics relating to the breeding program of the herd.
- Evaluate the rate of genetic progress that has been made by the herd. To do this, TakeStock assesses the genetic progress that a herd has made for each Selection Index and benchmarks the individual herd’s progress with the genetic progress that has been made by the breed as a whole.
- Identify the key factors that explain significant differences in the rate of genetic progress between herds within a breed across a given period of years. These factors are known as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). The KPIs help breeders identify the type of factors that had the greatest impact on the rate of genetic progress made by herds within their breed. Herds are rated for their performance against each KPI to benchmark the performance of their breeding program.

By requesting a TakeStock report for their herd, seedstock producers can identify areas within their breeding program that can be manipulated to increase their herd’s rate of genetic progress. Ultimately, TakeStock provides seedstock producers with the opportunity to assess whether the genetics in their herd will continue to be competitive in the future.

**Accessing a TakeStock Report for your herd**

Herd that meet the relevant eligibility criteria can access a TakeStock report for their herd by attending one of the 10 workshops that are being conducted by Southern Beef Technology Services (SBTS) and Tropical Beef Technology Services (TBTS) across Australia between April and September 2008. The workshops are titled “TakeStock – The Key to Maximising Genetic Progress” and are available at a subsidised cost of $110 per enterprise (inc GST), which includes the cost of the TakeStock report.

Further information regarding the TakeStock workshop series is available on the back page of this update.

Members who are unable to attend the workshop series will be able to access a TakeStock report by requesting one directly from BREEDPLAN. However, TakeStock reports will not be available via this method until the Summer 2009 series of GROUP BREEDPLAN analyses (ie. December 2008) onwards and members will be required to pay a fee to ABRI of $275 (inc. GST).

It is important to note that a TakeStock report can not be generated for all seedstock herds. In general, herds must be a current member of BREEDPLAN, be a member of a breed that has at least one Selection Index, have been performance recording with BREEDPLAN for several years and have more than 15-20 calves recorded each year.
**TBTS & SBTS Coordinate Activities**

While still remaining separate organisations, Tropical Beef Technology Services (TBTS) & Southern Beef Technology Services will now coordinate most of their major activities in order to increase the efficiency of the genetic extension services that are offered to the beef seedstock industry.

Tropical Beef Technology Services (TBTS) has been in operation since 1998 and is responsible for the extension of genetic technologies to the Brahman, Santa Gertrudis, Droughtmaster, Belmonts, Brangus, Braford, Charbray and Simbrah breeds. Southern Beef Technology Services (SBTS) has been in operation since 2006 and is responsible for the extension of genetic technologies to the Hereford, Shorthorn, Murray Grey, Limousin, Charolais, Simmental, Red Angus, South Devon, Wagyu, Devon, Red Poll, Salers, Blonde d’Aquitaine and Gelbvieh breeds.

As part of the coordination of activities, the “TakeStock – The Key to Maximising Genetic Progress” and “Closer to Your Clients” workshop packages are being run in conjunction during 2008. TBTS members will now also receive the regular “Update” newsletters which were previously produced for SBTS members only.

**Expansion of BREEDPLAN Services**

Several Breed Societies have recently expanded the BREEDPLAN services that are offered to their members.

Herefords Australia has opted to undertake an additional GROUP BREEDPLAN analysis. Hereford BREEDPLAN will now run 4 GROUP BREEDPLAN analyses per year with the additional GROUP BREEDPLAN analysis being conducted in the Spring.

Belmont Australia and the Red Angus Society of Australia are currently developing BreedObject Selection Indexes for their breed, and the South Devon Cattle Society, Devon Cattle Breeders Association and Australian Gelbvieh Association have expressed interest in developing Selection Indexes.

**New Tip Sheets Available**

Several new Tip Sheets are now available from the SBTS (http://sbts.une.edu.au) & TBTS (http://tbts.une.edu.au) websites, including:

- Displaying BREEDPLAN Information in Sale Catalogues & Advertisements
- Common Performance Recording Problems
- Selecting Animals with Selection Indexes
- Recording Muscle Scores
- Calculating EBVs forIntroduced Animals
- Reportability of EBVs

To access the tip sheets, simply go to either the SBTS or TBTS website and click on the BREEDPLAN Documents link. Paper copies of the tip sheets can also be accessed by contacting staff at BREEDPLAN.
Trial Flight Time EBVs Released

The Animal Genetics & Breeding Unit (AGBU) has recently produced Trial Flight Time EBVs for the Santa Gertrudis Breeders (Australia) Association. The Trial EBVs were produced for 5 participating Santa Gertrudis members and were calculated using over 5000 flight time measurements.

Flight Time has been shown to be a quick, easy to measure and effective means of objectively assessing temperament in beef cattle. As research has demonstrated a relationship between superior temperament and increased meat quality (due to the ability to handle pre-slaughter stresses such as handling and transport), flight time has been proposed as a suitable method of improving meat tenderness, particularly in tropically adapted cattle.

Flight Time is measured objectively using two light beams and is the time taken for an animal to travel approximately 1.7 metres after leaving the crush. For the most effective information, flight time measurements should be recorded at weaning. The flight time measurements recorded on Santa Gertrudis animals had a moderate heritability, indicating that selection for sires with low flight time would result in improved temperament in progeny.

Any BREEDPLAN members interested in recording flight time on their animals should contact staff at either SBTS or TBTS to discuss both the issues involved and the availability of flight time equipment.

Inclusion of Gene Markers into BREEDPLAN

The SmartGene for Beef project is continuing to evaluate the feasibility of enhancing the accuracy of Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs) by incorporating gene marker information from DNA tests. SmartGene for Beef is a collaborative R&D project between Catapult Genetics, Beef Genetic Technologies CRC, the Animal Genetics and Breeding Unit (AGBU), the Agricultural Business Research Institute (ABRI), Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA), Cornell University and Breedlink Pty Ltd. The Queensland Government also provides co-funding.

The genotyping of 14,000 DNA samples from animals involved in the Beef CRC I & II projects has now been completed and AGBU scientists have analysed the gene effects of the 12 Catapult gene markers that are currently available on tenderness, marbling, feed efficiency. Research has also been conducted on the gene effects of animals within the Durham Shorthorn Project.

The SmartGene Management Committee is currently compiling these results with full industry publication likely towards the end of 2008, including a seminar at the Brisbane Exhibition in August.

Breed Society Staff Receive Update

In February, senior Breed Society staff and technical representatives from the Breed Society Boards of 9 Breed Societies participating in the SBTS project gathered in Armidale to update their knowledge of the latest developments in genetic technologies. The day was conducted by members of the SBTS team, with several guest speakers from AGBU & ABRI.

Seminar attendees were presented with a range of information regarding the latest genetic technology developments. Attendees were able to discuss the options that were available for the implementation of the new technologies in their breed with both technical staff and the representatives of other Breed Societies.
Upcoming Workshops

“TakeStock – The Key to Maximising Genetic Progress”

Following the successful TakeStock workshops that were run in Dalby and Rockhampton in April, workshops will be run across the rest of Australia during July, August & September as part of the release of the new genetic benchmarking tool, TakeStock.

The “TakeStock – The Key to Maximising Genetic Progress” workshop series is targeted at seedstock producers and specifically concentrates on Selection Indexes, the factors that influence the rate of genetic improvement, and the TakeStock package. Workshop participants will receive a TakeStock report for their herd and learn how to use the information within their report to increase their herd’s rate of genetic improvement.

Workshops will be conducted in the following locations.

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Venue</th>
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<tr>
<td>Monday 14\textsuperscript{th} July</td>
<td>Quirindi</td>
<td>Quirindi RSL</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday 16\textsuperscript{th} July</td>
<td>Parkes</td>
<td>Parkes Services &amp; Citizens Club</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday 18\textsuperscript{th} July</td>
<td>Holbrook</td>
<td>Holbrook CTC Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday 18\textsuperscript{th} August</td>
<td>Murray Bridge</td>
<td>Murray Bridge &amp; Districts Community Club</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday 20\textsuperscript{th} August</td>
<td>Hamilton</td>
<td>Vic DPI, Hamilton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday 22\textsuperscript{nd} August</td>
<td>Seymour</td>
<td>Seymour Club</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday 11\textsuperscript{th} September</td>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>TBA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday 25\textsuperscript{th} September</td>
<td>Launceston</td>
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“Closer to Your Clients”

Nine seedstock herds will be hosting a workshop for their clients between July & November, including:

- Wirruna Poll Hereford Stud
- Woolcott Shorthorn Stud
- Elite Poll Hereford Stud
- Gyranda Santa Gertrudis Stud
- Melaleuca Murray Grey Stud
- Yavenvale Hereford Stud
- Mawarra Hereford Stud
- Monterey Murray Grey Stud
- Wightfields Santa Gertrudis Stud

Workshops have already been conducted during 2008 at Lindsay Murray Grey Stud & Bowen Poll Hereford Stud.

The “Closer to your Clients” workshops provide seedstock producers with the opportunity to host a one day workshop on their property for their commercial clients. The workshops are conducted by the SBTS & TBTS teams and are a mix of practical discussion and yard demonstration. Sessions include discussion on the effective selection of breeding cattle, an overview of the genetic selection tools available and practical demonstrations of how to use EBVs and selection indexes when choosing bulls.

Other seedstock herds interested in hosting a workshop in 2008 are encouraged to contact staff at SBTS or TBTS as soon as possible to register their expression of interest.

Southern Beef Technology Services (SBTS) & Tropical Beef Technology Services (TBTS) provide technical support to beef producers in the use and understanding of the different genetic technologies that are available.