Canadian Luing Cattle Association Newsletter

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Message From The Secretary

Iain Aitken

Welcome to our first Newsletter of 2019. Like a lot of ranchers in Western Canada we are really enjoying the milder winter thus far which is helping us stretch limited feed resources - hopefully this continues and we get an early spring followed by a great growing season this time around!

2018 was another year of active demand for our cattle and we supplied bulls and a few females to a diversity of customers. From single bull purchases to groups of ten, from Northern Alberta to the first Luing bull in 20 years heading to southern Ontario. The Carson family of Thornhill, Manitoba continued their 40 year connection with the breed by purchasing another bull and at the same time we were also able to supply the following first time purchasers:
James Bowzaylo, Athabasca, AB
Glenn McKenzie, Balderson, ON
Nielsen Rand, Didsbury, AB
Ted Unruh, Cromer, MB
James Van Staalduinen, Bergen, AB

Many thanks to all our customers and I hope your purchases are doing well.

<u>Luings currently for sale</u>

A good selection of rising two year old Luing bulls for sale from the Medicine River and Greywood herds. Located Belmont, Manitoba. Delivery can be arranged across western Canada and into Ontario.
Please feel free to call me at (204) 537 2620 for further information.

Scurs in the Luing Breed

Iain Aitken

While writing the article on horns in the Luing breed in the last newsletter I purposely didn't mention scurs as I didn't want to further complicate the issue.
A scur, as I'm sure most of you know, is a horny growth that is attached to the skin of the head as opposed to a true horn which is attached to the skull. The most common type of scurs seen in our breed are small button-like attachments that barely protrude through the hair. On occasion they are larger such as the "Shorthorn type" scurs pictured below.

The genetics controlling scurs are not well understood - and to date there is no genomic test available to ascertain the presence or absence of scurs. DNA testing has mapped the poll gene to bovine chromosome 1 and the scur gene to bovine chromosome 19 but the actual genes have not yet been identified. From this we can probably conclude that scurs are caused by a totally different and unrelated gene to horns.

I found the following explanation of what is known about scurs by Darrh Bullock, Extension Professor, University of Kentucky to be as concise as anything I've read.

"The scur condition is thought to be sex influenced meaning that its action is different depending on whether it is a male or a female. It appears that in females the non-scur allele (Sn) is dominant to the scur allele (Sc), similar to polled and horned.
However, in males the action seems to be the opposite; the scur allele is dominant to the non-scur allele. The part that makes the scur condition more confusing is that it is also dependent on the horn/poll genotype of the animal. Therefore, we potentially have three different factors that determine whether a calf will develop scurs or not: poll/horn genotype; scur genotype; and the sex of the calf. The first thing that should be very obvious is that horned cattle (pp) cannot have the scur phenotype. If cattle have the genotype for both the horned condition and the scurred condition they will always be horned. For a bull/steer to develop scurs, it must be a horn allele carrier (Pp) ***AND*** *be either heterozygous for the scur allele (SnSc) or be homozygous for the scur allele (ScSc). For a heifer/cow to develop scurs she must be a horn*

allele carrier (Pp) ***AND*** *homozygous for the scur allele (ScSc). For a bull to be smooth polled it must be either homozygous polled (PP), regardless of the scur genotype,* ***OR*** *heterozygous polled (Pp) and homozygous for the non-scur allele (SnSn). For a heifer to be smooth polled it must be homozygous polled (PP), regardless of scur genotype,* ***OR*** *heterozygous polled (Pp) and homozygous or heterozygous for the non-scur allele (SnSn or SnSc)"*

One thing to note here is that homozygous polled bulls, although not demonstrating scurs, can in some cases sire scurred calves when mated to a cow has both the scur allele and the horn allele. Saying that, using homozygous polled bulls is still the surest way to reduce the incidence of scurs within a population over time.

Identifying scurs from horns is not always straight forward. As the horns on very young calves wiggle about they may not feel any different to scurs at this stage. In my experience with Luings though scurs are usually significantly smaller and may not even have appeared when we process our calves at around two months of age. By nine months of age scurs will have developed if they are going to and by this age a horn will be firmly attached to the skull whereas the scur will still wiggle. I've read that on occasion a scur on an older mature animal can attach to the skull in the same manner as a horn but I have never experienced this myself.

While some breed Associations require that scurred cattle be identified as such in a separate category at time of registration ours registers scurred cattle as polled. For all intents and purposes to the commercial producer that makes sense as scurred calves will not incur the rancher an auction market discount like horns do.

For the purebred breeder it is just another trait to be aware of and if you encounter a calf where it's unclear if it carries horns or scurs it is best to delay dehorning until the animal is older. Another option of course would be to DNA test the suspect calf for presence of horns which would confirm scur status by elimination.

Most importantly we must first ensure the bull is off sufficient quality to make a herd sire and not decide solely on horn/poll/scur status. Single trait selection is always a bad idea!

Warrior's dam - LLR Luing 223U at age 23.

Luing Semen Update

In an effort to provide more options for our customers I'm pleased to announce that we now have semen available off Medicine River Warrior 21W.

Warrior pictured at 8 years old.

As mentioned in the previous edition I have been particularly impressed with this bull's performance over the years. He has proven to be exceptionally fertile and trouble-free year after year. As a rising nine year old his feet and legs are perfect and as a result has never been lame a day in his life. With his oldest daughters now carrying their seventh calves I can say they have been the most consistent and trouble-free sire group of females i've ever had.

I like to think this trouble-free consistency comes from his dam - Lochend Luing 223U, an outstanding cow bred by Dr Bob Church. I purchased her at 15 years old and she went on to rear calves every year until she was 23 - while running with the rest of the herd getting no preferential treatment. Warrior's sire was Lochend Snowlander 185Y who was a 3/4 brother to 223U - both were sired by Luing Bonus, the last Scottish bull to be imported to Canada.

The Warrior bull was born as a result of embryo transfer so his cross-bred recipient dam influenced his 95lb birthweight. I believe genetically he is really in the 80-85lb range. We have used him extensively on heifers and have never had a difficult calving as a result.

In addition to Warrior we still have a good inventory of Lochend Achayella 34P semen. He also descends from 223U having her as Grandmother on one side and Great Grandmother on the other. In my experience he produces calves with a little more growth and mature size than Warrior. They also have good maternal characteristics and have a little less hair.

We also have limited stocks of semen off Rothney Grand 53G and Lochend Snowlander 185Y. All these bulls are heterozygous polled.

Warrior semen is priced at $25/straw the other bulls are all $20. All FOB AltaGenetics, Balzac, AB. A volume discount is offered - buy any 50 straws and we'll give you 5 more for free!

Please contact the Secretary for further information or to place an order.

Cost Control Critical

Iain Aitken

I was delighted to see late last year that Dr Kris Ringwall, of North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension Centre has accepted a new position as the director of University of Saskatchewan's newly established Livestock and Forage Centre of Excellence.

I have always found his articles, which are widely available on the internet, to be well grounded in the gritty reality of the low margin cow/calf sector. I particularly enjoy those featuring detailed cost of production analysis. Although he uses American figures I would expect them to be similar to those in Canada. One of his articles (BeefTalk: Cost Per Pound of Calf is Struggling) highlighted cost of production increases between 2000 and the 2012-2017 period. This cost (expressed per pound weaned per cow exposed) in 2015 was double what it had been in 2000. The average during the whole 2012-2017 period was 180% of what it had been back in 2000.

In addition the pounds weaned per cow exposed actually fell by 3lbs from 2000 to the later time period. Given that we have no control over the price we receive for calves the challenge is to survive with similar pounds to sell and higher production costs. Despite what a lot of bull sellers will tell you, the ability to wean heavier calves without an associated increase in production costs is generally limited by biological and environmental reality.

The point Dr Ringwall made was that the only way we can influence profitability in our operations is by controlling costs ruthlessly. The highest production cost year in his analysis coincided with the highest cattle market price which could likely be partly explained by increases in replacement breeding stock values. I suspect too though that when market prices hit that seemingly crazy peak once in every cattle cycle ranchers tend to lose focus on cost control and spend the extra income rather than saving it for the leaner years that will surely follow. According to Harlan Hughs, Professor Emeritus at University of North Dakota the remaining years of this cattle cycle (2019 - 2020) will be tough financially and the peak of the next cattle cycle won't occur until 2026-2027. That's a long way off - are you controlling your costs well enough to sustain your business until then?

A Typical warrior daughter with calf.

A reminder of warmer days!

Canadian Luing Cattle Association

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