

Fertility Index

Although levels of herd fertility are more dependent on management than breeding, a variety of measurable traits have been combined into a UK fertility index (FI) for use in selecting bulls, as part of a determined effort to improve fertility in the UK.

The fertility index to select for female fertility was first introduced in May 2005. This index provides a guide to the fertility of the daughters of a bulls in UK herds. Six traits, which are either direct measures of fertility or have strong correlations with fertility, are collected on a bull's progeny in UK dairy herds and make up the Fertility Index. These are:

1. Calving Interval
2. Non return rate
3. Body condition Score
4. Measure of milk yield around insemination
5. Days from calving to first insemination
6. Number of inseminations needed to get a cow in calf

Based on the above traits, plus information gathered on family members, this index provides a practical tool to selection based on daughter fertility. The Fertility Index is published as a financial figure. The higher the proof the more financial benefit results from improved fertility.

A bull with an above average Fertility Index will breed cows with improved calving intervals and better non-return levels. As a rough guideline, every point increase in Fertility Index, say from -3 to -2, will decrease calving interval by half a day and improve non return rates by 0.5%

The range in Fertility Index is roughly from +15 to -15 with an average for available Holsteins of -0.5 (Aug'11).

Although levels of herd fertility are quicker influenced by management changes than breeding, it has to be remembered that improvements through breeding are permanent and cumulative from one generation to the next.

Our advice is to use Fertility in combination with other available information on a bulls genetic potential. It is important that it is only used a part of a wider selection policy, and not as a primary selection criteria.

