



Hollywood Cows?

Do you ever get the impression that our culture is obsessed with appearances? Unfortunately, isn't this same idea prevalent in dairy cattle genetics? Why do we place so much emphasis on the way that cows look? What is the purpose of appraising cows for conformation? Isn't it to predict those cows that will survive a long time and be trouble free?

The biggest obstacle to this is that mankind has preconceived ideas about how a cow should look, that are absolutely wrong. Isn't this what has caused today's modern dairy cows to have such low survival rates, or longevity? We have selected for bigger cows, yet we wonder why we have so many calving problems. Additionally, we want our cows to look thin, or "dairy." Does this make any sense? If we have two cows that are producing the same level of milk, won't the one with more body condition (the fatter one) breed back sooner and have less health problems?

The bottom line is that beyond structural correctness there is not an advantage to additional "beauty." You may ask what is wrong with selecting for high performing cattle that also look nice. Unfortunately, these traits don't come together in the same package. Big, thin looking cows are not trouble free and they do not stay in the herd for a long time. Additionally, the more traits that we select for, the less improvement we will make in each trait. We are in the business of producing food for human beings and we should be good stewards of our assets. We should not waste our efforts on traits that don't improve our ability to produce human food more efficiently.

Is it possible that we spend too much time looking at young, first lactation cows admiring how they look? Shouldn't we instead look at the oldest cows in our herds, determine what traits have allowed them to survive for so long, and learn to appreciate that?

Today, we have an advantage in our quest to breed a high producing, longer lived, trouble free cow. We have genetic evaluations for longevity itself (Productive Life) and health traits (Daughter Pregnancy Rate, Somatic Cell Score, and Calving Ability) that are better able to predict longevity than most type traits (refer to the Relationship to Longevity table to the right).

I am not suggesting that we ignore conformation completely. We want our cows to be structurally sound. The single most important conformation trait related to longevity is udder depth. Cows with deeper udders that are closer to the ground do not survive as long as cows with shallower udders. Isn't this common sense and isn't it an example of structural correctness? It is important to select for production as well as shallow udders because selecting for shallow udders alone will result in low producing cows.

If you are interested in more material related to this subject, I suggest you take a look at an article entitled "Utility is Beauty" which is posted on our website (www.metzgerdairygenetics.com). This article was written by Rockefeller Prentice almost forty years ago. Did any of us listen to his words of wisdom?



Relationships to Longevity

DPR (fertility)	.51
Calving ability	.40
SCS (mastitis)	.38*
Udder	.30
Feet & Legs	.19
Protein	.17
Body size	.16*
Milk	.15
Fat	.14

*negative relationship

Sourced from USDA-AIPL website

What is Truth?

Truth is that which conforms to fact or reality. Is there an absolute moral truth or standard for human behavior? Or, is everything relative? Is what works for you true for you and what works for me true for me? Two conflicting things can not both be true at the same time.

Is there a way that we can know truth? Isn't the truth written on our hearts or our conscience? C.S. Lewis said that human beings have an idea that they should behave in a certain way. Even those that disagree have an idea how other people should behave. If you do something to them, they will say it is unfair or ask how we would like it if someone did the same to us.

Our society says that we should be "tolerant" or not say anything that might offend someone. This is a new definition for the word tolerant. In the past, tolerating meant that you treated everyone with dignity even if you didn't agree with them. The truth can be offensive because it convicts. However, it is important for all of us to speak the truth because ideas have consequences. Believing lies causes immeasurable anguish and suffering in our lives. Lies such as the following:

Do whatever feels good. Your choices will have no consequences or effect on others.

Your life is a mess because of other people or your environment, not your choices.

You can have whatever you want now. Just buy it with credit.

Prosperity is created by redistributing wealth, not by hard work.

Government can better take care of people than their neighbors will.

If your marriage is difficult, get a divorce. Your life will be better and your kids will get over it without any negative effects.

Abortion is not killing a human being, it is a choice.

Sex outside of marriage doesn't cause negative consequences such as emotional pain, physical disease, or children born into poverty.

Can you think of any others? Don't be afraid to question the lie and speak the truth in kindness.

Metzger Dairy Genetics

Livestock were created to produce human food. Our business is helping your food production business be more profitable. Metzger Dairy Genetics is owned and operated by John Metzger and provides genetic improvement services for dairy producers. Services include sire selection, semen purchasing, breed selection, breeding systems, and female selection. For help with your livestock genetic improvement program contact:

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