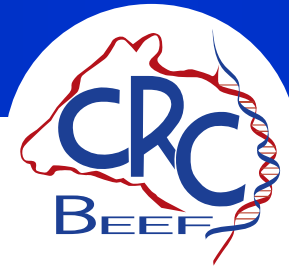


Cooperative Research Centre for Beef Genetic Technologies

CJ Hawkins Homestead
University of New England
ARMIDALE NSW 2351
AUSTRALIA

(Beef CRC Limited – ABN 89 114 837 526)

ph (02) 6773 3501
fax (02) 6773 3500
email beefcrc@une.edu.au
web www.beefcrc.com.au



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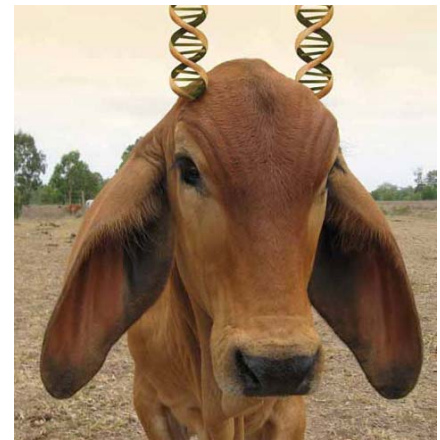
JOINT MEDA STATEMENT: BEEF CRC, CSIRO, MEAT & LIVESTOCK AUSTRALIA

New test to breed out horns in Australian cattle

A new DNA test to identify polled cattle (cattle born without horns) for Australian breeds, to help improve industry productivity and animal welfare by breeding out horns, has been released to industry today.

Following successful outcomes of research trials conducted across Australia by the Beef CRC, CSIRO and Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA), in collaboration with the Animal Genetics and Breeding Unit (AGBU), the new test will be initially be released in an industry validation phase.

Dr Heather Burrow, CEO of the Beef CRC said the polled gene trait is reasonably well understood in *Bos Taurus* breeds. However, the Australian beef industry also needed a test developed for *Bos Indicus* breeds used in Australian production systems.



“Industry’s experience with DNA markers is that they can sometimes over-promise and under-deliver,” said Dr Burrow.

“We need a test that is validated in Australian breeds, so producers can be confident in using it to make selection decisions for polledness.”

Cattle bred for harsh Northern Australian conditions are predominantly horned – a key cause of bruising, hide damage and other injuries, particularly in yards, feedlots and during transport, which is why dehorning is routinely practiced.

The new DNA test identifies whether cattle are ‘true polled’, as a polled animal may still carry a recessive gene for the horned trait and have a proportion of horned offspring. This mixed ‘heterozygous’ genotype is also associated with scurs, which are incomplete horns.

Wayne Hall, MLA Manager for Northern Production Research, said there are welfare and productivity gains to be made from introducing more polled cattle into the herd.

“Cattle in the North are often run in extensive production systems, so you may not see a calf until it is 6-12 months old and dehorning older calves involves greater welfare considerations and is more labour intensive,” he said.

“A gene marker provides cattle breeders with an additional tool to speed up the process of getting polled animals into the herd. Now we need to know how well the test works in wider populations to ensure producers can confidently utilise the tool in North Australian conditions within *Bos indicus* breeds.”

Trials show the marker is closely associated with the polled characteristic, although only small numbers of animals have been tested so far.

In the seven breeds used for field testing – Brahman, Santa Gertrudis, Droughtmaster, Limousin, Hereford, Brangus and Belmont Red – the test’s accuracy of a true polled animal having a polled phenotype was approximately 90 percent.

Dr Burrow said if the test results were replicated in wider cattle populations, the test would be very useful for industry. However, she said the test was not perfect and producers were strongly encouraged to report anomalies to the research team.

During its initial validation phase, the test will be offered at minimal cost and further discounts will be offered if tests are done in bulk or through breed societies.

By participating in the project, producers will have the opportunity to increase their information on the genotypes of their animals, as well as help ‘road test’ a technology that may help breed out horns.

View more information about the polled gene test at www.beefcrc.com.au

More information:

Ms Sarah Meibusch, Chief Operating Officer - Commercialisation, Beef CRC, Tel: 07 3378 5765, Mob 0409 595 408, email: Sarah.Meibusch@beefcrc.com.au

Mr Wayne Hall, Manager Northern Production Research, Meat & Livestock Australia, Tel: 07 3620 5228, Mob: 0407 727 992 email: whall@mla.com.au

Dr Drewe Ferguson, Principal Research Scientist, CSIRO Livestock Industries Tel: (02) 6776 1354, Mob 0419 663 404, email: drew.ferguson@csiro.au

Media contacts:

Margaret Puls, Beef CRC Communication Manager, Tel 0419 578 356, Email Margaret.Puls@beefcrc.com.au

Lisa Palu, Manager Public Affairs & Communication, CSIRO Livestock Industries, Tel 0419 663 404, email Lisa.Palu@csiro.au

Will Banks, Stakeholder Relations, Meat & Livestock Australia, Tel 0404 842 971, email wbanks@mla.com.au

