

Genomic test for dairy cows launched in SA

Animal health company, Zoetis has launched a genome test, Clarifide Plus, to predict key cow and calf wellness traits in South Africa's dairy cattle, which will enable farmers to fine tune their management, selection and breeding decisions with confidence.



Image source: [123RF](#)

According to technical manager for the Ruminants Division at Zoetis South Africa, Dr Chantelle Erwee, genomic testing will assist dairy farmers in identifying specific traits in dairy cattle to predict which animals are more resilient to certain costly diseases as well as those with higher potential for important traits such as milk production, fertility and productive life.

The aim of the genomic test is to help dairy farmers to build a healthier herd by testing heifers as early as possible in their lifetime. This will help to avoid unnecessary costs incurred by raising heifers that end up leaving the herd prematurely. At the same time, farmers will be able to improve breeding strategies and selection decisions.

The number of dairy farms in South Africa has dropped by 65 % between January 2009 and August 2019. However, the good news is that despite major changes in the industry, milk production increased by 31 % between 2009 and 2018 and milk production per producer rose by 273 %. Ultimately, reliable information provided by genomic testing will enable farmers to fine tune their management, selection and breeding decisions with confidence.

Test features

The genome test allows producers to rank animals with the Dairy Wellness Profit Index (DWP\$) which is based on traits that affect health, performance and the lifetime profit of cows and calves. DWP\$ describes more genetic variation in profitability allowing for faster progress towards greater profitability.

Zoetis teamed up with an agricultural banking and consulting institution to identify dairy operating measures that correlate with the financial health of contemporary dairy farms. From this, six key financial drivers of Net Farm Income were identified - net herd replacement costs, pregnancy rates, heifer survival, energy corrected milk, somatic cell count and death loss in cows.

The test also enhances the ability to improve the outcomes of these financial drivers by improving the ability to genetically select key performance and wellness-related traits.

"Cow and calf wellness genomic predictions were developed because of the commitment by Zoetis to the continuum of care for dairy cattle. We strive to improve dairy wellness and understand genetic factors impacting resistance to common diseases in dairy cattle," says Dr Erwee.

Dr Erwee says that utilising genomic testing like Clarifide® Plus also assists farmers and veterinarians involved in technologies such as embryo transfer to make smart decisions when it comes to selecting females as recipients or donors and indirectly guides them on sire selection.

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