



Two long-time Angus supporters, Wairoa's John Bayly and Waikato Angus enthusiast Phil Bayley pictured with some Whangara sires during the bull walk last month.

'Genetic markers offer final part of jigsaw'

BEEF genetics experts all agree gene markers are the future for genetic improvement and further research will enable this technology to reach its full potential.

Catapult Genetics currently offers the GeneSTAR suite of tests for marbling, tenderness and feed efficiency in New Zealand and will soon be increasing the offering, as well as increasing the power of the current tests.

This new technology is still developing but Catapult is on the verge of the next revolution of tests and once this arrives, the technology will become an integral part of any breeding programme looking for the next quantum leap in genetic improvement, says Catapult's Sarah Adams.

"The current tests provide breeders and commercial farmers with a useful tool to measure some of the more hard-to-measure traits, like marbling and feed efficiency and they provide valuable information to feed into the breeding programme."

For the bull buyer, the system is simple. A bull can have a maximum of eight stars for each of the three traits – marbling, tenderness and feed efficiency. All buyers need to understand is the more stars the better for each trait.

"The debate among genetics experts and breeders is not around the technology but more when is the right time to take the plunge and start to use this technology to base breeding decisions on," says Adams.

The exciting thing about genetic markers is from an early age, you can get a good indication, often as accurate as progeny testing, of the genetic merit of the animal.

In one year, Catapult Genetics believes breeders will be able to sample a calf at two weeks of age and they will have a genetic test for five traits that explain a significant amount of the genetic variation for each of those traits including carcase quality and yield and feed efficiency.

In three years, Catapult Genetics believes breeders will be able to sample a calf at two weeks of age and have a range of genetic tests that explain even more of the genetic variation for five-10 traits including carcase quality and yield, feed

efficiency, fertility, parasite and disease resistance.

"We believe breeders and bull buyers should use this information as another decision-making tool, not instead of the decision-making tools currently available."

"It is still important to do everything you have always done in bull selection — look at the soundness and constitution of the animal and then the performance records that are important for your environment and breeding objectives."

"The genetic markers offer the final part in the jigsaw to enable you to make the next leap in genetic improvement," says Adams.

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