

## Breaking into the AI cycle

Michael Macbeth

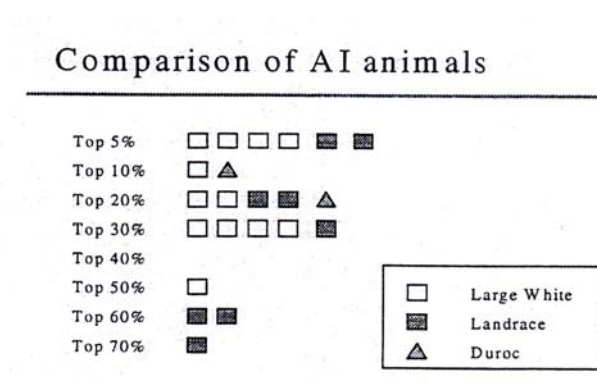
*Animal Research Institute, Queensland Department of Primary Industry*

Artificial insemination (AI) in Australia is slowly being established as both a management tool for ease of mating and as a means of disseminating superior genes to improve productive performance.

Batch farrowing in South Australia has increased the use of AI in some herds to 80%; however genetic performance seems to be of secondary concern to many producers choosing breeder replacements. This is also reflected in other industries. The relationship between AI price and EBV/Index is low for the lamb and dairy industries although there is an increasingly strong relationship between EBV/Index and volume of lamb AI sales (Pers. comm. Robert Banks). In Canada OSI there is a standard price for purebred AI regardless of their EBV/Index although I suspect a higher volume of sales for boars with superior EBVs.

The range of genetic merit of Australia AI boars is of concern (Figure 1). Some animals are below average. As a comparison, the dairy industry has a wide choice of animals available for selection with only the top 5% used in AI. One problem with the Australian pig industry is that there is a demand for a wider range of genes (i.e. from other herds) than what can currently be offered from the top 5%.

Figure 1. Percentile ranking of AI boars in Australia



We need to widen the selection of boars with high ranking EBVs to establish a market cycle for AI (Figure 2). A wider choice of boars from different herds should help promote genetic improvement and increase volume of semen sales. This will increase returns to NPIP participants supplying AI boars and also help with their promotion of live animal sales.

One of the biggest problems in breaking into the AI cycle has been to promote the value of genetic improvement to commercial herds. There has never been a coordinated national approach to promoting the value of genetic improvement in Australia. The fact that some effort is needed by the commercial sector to understand

the basics of genetic improvement has not helped nor that fact that some degree of faith in the value of EBVs is required.

Figure 2. The AI cycle

