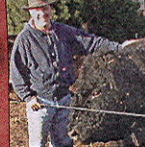


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SWABBING NASAL passages or taking a tissue sample from an ear tag hole provides enough genetic material from a heifer or cow for a DNA test.

By FRAN O'LEARY

WHILE it may seem DNA testing is a futuristic idea, it has actually become another tool available to dairy producers.

For several years, dairy producers have put DNA technology to work in their herds by testing for genetic recessives such as complex vertebral malformation and bovine leukocyte adhesion deficiency, also known as CVM and BLAD, or to identify carriers of red coat color genes, according to Eric Olstad, director of marketing for East Central/Select Sires in Waupun.

"Now many producers are taking the next step and are utilizing DNA testing to make

Key Points

- DNA tests can predict the longevity of a cow.
- Igenity tests cost \$35 per animal.
- Tests are good for the life of the animal.

marketing, mating and selection decisions," Olstad says. "They're finding that analysis of economically important traits, through DNA technology, can complement existing on-farm breeding and management practices to allow for the most in-depth look ever into an animal's genetic potential."

The Igenity profile, available through Select Sires in partnership with Merial, is a predictor

of longevity in dairy cattle using DNA analysis.

According to Olstad, the inside information from a DNA profile provides a new perspective on cow longevity.

"Now, producers can predict potential for longevity earlier in an animal's life than ever before," he says.

Analyzing productive life

Recent research released by Merial and Select Sires demonstrates a difference of 3.44 months of productive life between a female receiving a low score of 1 for the productive life analysis, as part of the comprehensive DNA Igenity profile, and one receiving a 10.

In partnership with Merial, Select Sires recently completed

Igenity profiles on all of its artificial-insemination sires.

"Choosing new AI sires that are +0.0 for productive life predicted transmitting ability [PTA] or higher and have an Igenity profile of 5 or higher for both productive life and dairy form will help select above-average longevity sires," Olstad explains.

Igenity provides sample kits free of charge. Producers only pay for each sample that is analyzed. The cost is \$35 per animal. Each kit contains materials to test 10 individual animals. Kits are available from Select Sires representatives or can be ordered online at www.igenity.com.

Direct observation of performance for longevity is only

available for older animals, but a DNA profile can give genetic information about longevity as soon as a calf is born. In fact, Olstad recommends testing calves and open heifers.

"Using the Igenity profile — which includes for productive life and dairy form — to supplement predicted transmitting ability values for AI sires on open heifers will help producers make more accurate breeding and selection decisions because the DNA makeup of an animal never changes, and the test results are good for the life of the animal," he says.

■ Read Pages 6 and 7 to learn how dairy producers are using sexed semen to get more heifer calves.