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UTILISATION OF MARKER ASSISTED SELECTION
IN THE NEW ZEALAND DAIRY INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

The genetic and economic benefits of marker assisted selection (MAS) to the New Zealand dairy industry were evaluated. The genetic marker was assumed to be the additive quantitative trait loci (QTL) itself and thus no recombination existed between the marker and QTL. Three sizes of QTL were evaluated; 0.1, 0.3 and 0.5 genetic standard deviations (σ_G), at three starting QTL frequencies; 0.01, 0.10 and 0.35. Three MAS strategies were evaluated and compared to the current New Zealand breeding scheme that had no genotypic knowledge of the QTL (control). The economic benefits, for the three MAS strategies, were calculated from the returns of extra milk produced, resultant from superior rates of increase in QTL frequency, less the costs of identifying the QTL linked genetic markers and subsequent genotyping.

The size of the QTL had a major effect on the economic viability of the MAS strategies. For a 0.1 σ_G QTL, the most profitable strategy to utilise the QTL was to ignore it and continue with the current breeding scheme. For a single additive QTL of size 0.3 σ_G , it had to be at the 0.35 starting frequency for the MAS strategy of progeny testing only homozygous and heterozygous QTL bulls, to be more profitable than the current breeding scheme. This same MAS strategy at the 0.5 σ_G sized QTL was the most profitable for the range of QTL starting frequencies evaluated.

The MAS strategy where only homozygous QTL bulls were progeny tested, was not economically viable for any of the QTL sizes and frequencies. This was due to the reduced selection differential on the cow to bull and bull to bull pathways. The third MAS strategy investigated utilised the current breeding scheme but included knowledge of the QTL genotype for the active cows and bulls. Superior rates of genetic gain were achieved at all QTL sizes and frequencies, but it was only economically profitable for a 0.5 σ_G QTL with a starting frequency of 0.35. Selection on large QTL with this strategy resulted in short-term genetic gain, but long-term loss. This was due to less selection intensity being applied to the quantitative background, in comparison to the control.

MAS is a long-term selection strategy as the earliest returns from extra milk production, were received ten years after the selection decisions on bulls entering the progeny test system were made. The increase in the QTL frequency was not immediate and thus the benefits of the increased QTL frequency were received in the later years of analysis.

The size and frequency of the QTL have to be ascertained before a decision on how to utilise the QTL can be made. The use of MAS in the present New Zealand breeding scheme may be profitable for a single additive QTL of size $0.5 \sigma_G$, with the degree of profitability being influenced by the starting QTL frequency.

Further study is required on the effect of; dominant QTL, multiple QTL, recombination between marker and QTL, use of multiple ovulation and embryo transfer and the utilisation of MAS in breeding schemes other than those based on progeny testing.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-------------|
| ABSTRACT | ii |
| LIST OF FIGURES | viii |
| LIST OF TABLES | x |
| | |
| CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| | |
| CHAPTER TWO REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE | 3 |
| 2.1 INTRODUCTION | 3 |
| 2.2 POLYMERASE CHAIN REACTION | 3 |
| 2.3 GENETIC MARKERS | 5 |
| 2.3.1 <i>Restriction Fragment Length Polymorphisms</i> | 5 |
| 2.3.2 <i>Variable Number Of Tandem Repeats</i> | 6 |
| 2.3.3 <i>Short Tandem Repeats</i> | 7 |
| 2.3.4 <i>Randomly Amplified Polymorphic DNA</i> | 8 |
| 2.4 GENETIC MAPS | 10 |
| 2.4.1 <i>Physical Maps</i> | 10 |
| 2.4.2 <i>Linkage Maps</i> | 11 |
| 2.5 ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN MARKERS AND QTL | 13 |
| 2.6 GENETIC AND ECONOMIC RESPONSES TO MAS | 17 |
| 2.7 NEW ZEALAND DAIRY BREEDING SCHEME | 18 |
| 2.8 MEASUREMENT OF GENETIC GAIN | 20 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| CHAPTER THREE BREEDING SCHEME MODEL | 22 |
| 3.1 INTRODUCTION | 22 |
| 3.2 BULL AND COW POPULATIONS | 22 |
| 3.3 SELECTION OF ANIMALS | 23 |
| 3.4 CALCULATION OF r_{gg} | 26 |
| 3.5 SETTING UP STARTING VALUES FOR THE POPULATIONS | 27 |
| 3.6 INCLUSION OF A QTL | 28 |
| 3.6.1 <i>Cow and Bull Populations</i> | 28 |
| 3.6.2 <i>QTL effect</i> | 28 |
| 3.6.3 <i>Selection of animals</i> | 31 |
| 3.6.4 <i>Progeny means</i> | 31 |
| 3.6.5 <i>Number of animals in each sub-population</i> | 32 |
| 3.7 UTILISATION OF A QTL IN BREEDING SCHEME | 33 |
| 3.8 ECONOMIC ANALYSIS | 34 |
| 3.8.1 <i>Expenses</i> | 34 |
| 3.8.2 <i>Income</i> | 34 |
| 3.8.3 <i>Discount rate</i> | 35 |
| | |
| CHAPTER FOUR MAIN FINDINGS | 36 |
| 4.1 CURRENT BREEDING SCHEME | 36 |
| 4.2 CURRENT SCHEME WITH NO GENOTYPING - 'CONTROL' | 37 |
| 4.3 USING GENOTYPING IN THE CURRENT SCHEME - 'STRATEGY ONE' | 38 |
| 4.3.1 <i>Genetic response</i> | 39 |
| 4.4 GENERATION OF QQ BULLS ONLY - 'STRATEGY TWO' | 45 |
| 4.4.1 <i>Genetic response</i> | 46 |
| 4.4.2 <i>QTL frequency</i> | 48 |
| 4.5 GENERATION OF QQ AND Q+ BULLS ONLY - 'STRATEGY THREE' | 49 |
| 4.5.1 <i>Genetic response</i> | 50 |
| 4.5.2 <i>QTL frequency</i> | 56 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSIONS | 58 |
| 5.1 AREAS OF FUTURE RESEARCH | 61 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 63 |
| APPENDICES | 68 |
| APPENDIX I: COW AND BULL POPULATION STARTING PARAMETERS FOR THE QTL ANALYSIS | 68 |
| APPENDIX II: NUMBER OF COWS NEEDED TO GENERATE A PROGENY TEST BULL | 69 |
| APPENDIX III: BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE THREE MARKER ASSISTED SELECTION STRATEGIES | 70 |
| APPENDIX IV: CALCULATION OF THE WORTH OF ONE GENETIC STANDARD DEVIATION | 71 |
| APPENDIX V: NUMBER OF HEIFERS ENTERING THE NATIONAL DAIRY HERD PER YEAR | 74 |
| APPENDIX VI: GENETIC AND ECONOMIC RESPONSES FOR STRATEGY ONE | 75 |
| APPENDIX VII: GENETIC AND ECONOMIC RESPONSES FOR STRATEGY TWO | 78 |
| APPENDIX VIII: GENETIC AND ECONOMIC RESPONSES FOR STRATEGY THREE | 80 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | |
|--|----|
| <i>Figure 1: Amplifying defined segments of DNA using PCR.</i> | 4 |
| <i>Figure 2: The action of restriction enzymes.</i> | 5 |
| <i>Figure 3: Microsatellite analysis.</i> | 7 |
| <i>Figure 4: Polymorphisms in a genomic region of four haploid individuals that result in the loss of a RAPD product.</i> | 9 |
| <i>Figure 5: Yeast artificial chromosome.</i> | 11 |
| <i>Figure 6: Recombinants and Non-recombinants.</i> | 12 |
| <i>Figure 7: Daughter design.</i> | 14 |
| <i>Figure 8: Granddaughter design.</i> | 15 |
| <i>Figure 9: Selection across age groups.</i> | 25 |
| <i>Figure 10: Economic analysis.</i> | 35 |
| <i>Figure 11: Change in proportion of QQ, Q+ and ++ female progeny and QTL frequency, due to selection without any knowledge of a $0.5 \sigma_G$ QTL at a starting frequency of 0.1.</i> | 37 |
| <i>Figure 12: Female progeny mean breeding value difference between the control and strategy one, at the QTL size of $0.5 \sigma_G$ and QTL starting frequency of 0.35.</i> | 41 |
| <i>Figure 13: Difference between strategy one and the control for additive genetic gain, QTL effect and female progeny breeding value means for the QTL size of $0.5 \sigma_G$ and at the QTL starting frequency of 0.35.</i> | 44 |
| <i>Figure 14: Difference in genetic merit of female progeny, between selection strategy two and the control for QTL sizes of 0.1 and $0.5 \sigma_G$ at starting QTL frequencies of 0.01, 0.1 and 0.35.</i> | 47 |
| <i>Figure 15: Proportion of female progeny in the three sub-populations for QTL size $0.1 \sigma_G$ and QTL starting frequency of 0.1.</i> | 49 |
| <i>Figure 16: Difference in genetic merit of female progeny, between selection strategy three and the control at QTL size of $0.3 \sigma_G$ for all starting frequencies.</i> | 51 |

- Figure 17: Difference in genetic merit of female progeny, between selection strategy three being undertaken for 1, 5 and 30 years and the control for a QTL size of $0.30 \sigma_G$ and starting frequency of 0.10. _____ 53*
- Figure 18: Difference in genetic merit of female progeny, between selection strategy three and the control at QTL size of $0.5 \sigma_G$ for all starting frequencies. _____ 54*
- Figure 19: Cumulative discounted returns from selection strategy three, at a $0.5 \sigma_G$ QTL and starting frequencies of 0.10 and 0.35, at discount rates of 5 and 6.5%. 56*
- Figure 20: Proportion of female progeny in the three sub-populations, and QTL frequency for QTL size 0.30 and QTL starting frequency of 0.10. _____ 57*
- Figure 21: Difference in genetic merit of female progeny, between selection strategy three being undertaken for 1, 5 and 30 years and the control for a QTL size of 0.30 and starting frequency of 0.10. _____ 82*

LIST OF TABLES

| | |
|--|----|
| <i>Table 1: Frequency of progeny in each sub population resultant from matings.</i> | 32 |
| <i>Table 2: Genetic superiority and generation intervals for the four selection pathways in the current breeding scheme.</i> | 36 |
| <i>Table 3: Percentage of animals selected from each age group in the current breeding scheme (age at selection).</i> | 37 |
| <i>Table 4: QTL frequencies at year thirty and the difference in the female progeny means over time between strategy one and the control, for the QTL size of $0.1 \sigma_G$ at the three starting QTL frequencies.</i> | 40 |
| <i>Table 5: Example population to demonstrate reduced selection differential for strategy one in comparison to the control.</i> | 42 |
| <i>Table 6: Within sub-population selection differentials and overall selection differential for strategy one and the control for the example population with a $0.5 \sigma_G$ QTL.</i> | 43 |
| <i>Table 7: Economic return for selection strategy one at a $0.5 \sigma_G$ QTL at the three starting QTL frequencies and three time horizons and five percent discount rate (NPV \$).</i> | 45 |
| <i>Table 8: Active cow and bull populations for the cow to bull and bull to bull pathways for the control and strategy two at the three QTL starting frequencies.</i> | 46 |
| <i>Table 9: Economic return for selection strategy three for QTL size of $0.3 \sigma_G$ and starting frequencies of 0.10 and 0.35, at two discount rates and three time horizons.</i> | 52 |
| <i>Table 10: Economic return for selection strategy three for $0.5 \sigma_G$ QTL at the three starting QTL frequencies, two discount rates and three time horizons.</i> | 55 |
| <i>Table 11: Cow population age structure starting mean EBV's and r_{gg} 's for the QTL analysis.</i> | 68 |
| <i>Table 12: Bull population age structure starting mean EBV's and r_{gg} 's for the QTL analysis.</i> | 68 |
| <i>Table 13: Percentage of mature equivalent production by lactation.</i> | 71 |
| <i>Table 14: Returns per cow per genetic standard deviation increase in milkfat.</i> | 73 |

| | |
|---|----|
| <i>Table 15: Female progeny mean breeding value differences between selection strategy one and the control, for a QTL of 0.1 σ_G at the three different starting QTL frequencies (σ_G).</i> | 75 |
| <i>Table 16: Net present value of extra milk revenue from strategy one for QTL size of 0.1 σ_G at the three starting QTL frequencies, and a discount rate of five percent for three time horizons.</i> | 75 |
| <i>Table 17: Female progeny mean breeding value differences between selection strategy one and the control, for a QTL of 0.3 σ_G at three different starting QTL frequencies (σ_G).</i> | 76 |
| <i>Table 18: Economic return for selection strategy one for a 0.3 σ_G QTL at the three starting QTL frequencies, two discount rates and three time horizons (NPV \$).</i> | 76 |
| <i>Table 19: Female progeny mean breeding value differences between selection strategy one and the control, for a QTL of 0.5 σ_G at three different starting QTL frequencies (σ_G).</i> | 77 |
| <i>Table 20: Economic return for selection strategy one for a 0.5 σ_G QTL at the three starting QTL frequencies, two discount rates and three time horizons (NPV \$).</i> | 77 |
| <i>Table 21: Female progeny mean breeding value differences between selection strategy two and the control, for a QTL of 0.1 σ_G at the three different starting QTL frequencies (σ_G).</i> | 78 |
| <i>Table 22: Female progeny mean breeding value differences between selection strategy two and the control, for a QTL of 0.3 σ_G at the three different starting QTL frequencies (σ_G).</i> | 78 |
| <i>Table 23: Female progeny mean breeding value differences between selection strategy two and the control, for a QTL of 0.5 σ_G at the three different starting QTL frequencies (σ_G).</i> | 79 |
| <i>Table 24: Economic return for selection strategy two for a 0.5 σ_G QTL at the 0.35 starting frequency, at two discount rates and three time horizons (NPV \$).</i> | 79 |
| <i>Table 25: Female progeny mean breeding value differences between selection strategy three and the control, for a QTL of 0.1 σ_G at the three different starting QTL frequencies (σ_G).</i> | 80 |
| <i>Table 26: Female progeny mean breeding value differences between selection strategy three and the control, for a QTL of 0.3 σ_G at the three different starting QTL frequencies (σ_G).</i> | 80 |
| <i>Table 27: Economic return for selection strategy three for a 0.3 σ_G QTL at the 0.1 and 0.35 starting frequencies, at two discount rates and three time horizons (NPV \$).</i> | 81 |

Table 28: Female progeny mean breeding value differences between selection strategy three and the control, for a QTL of $0.5 \sigma_G$ at the three different starting QTL frequencies (σ_G). _____ 81

Table 29: Economic return for selection strategy three for a $0.5 \sigma_G$ QTL at the three starting QTL frequencies, two discount rates and three time horizons (NPV\$).__ 82

Table 30: Extra economic returns of the one and five year operation of strategy three over the thirty year operation at a $0.3 \sigma_G$ QTL and 0.1 and 0.35 QTL starting frequencies at two discount rates and three time horizons (NPV\$). _____ 83