

# 10 tips to Successful Crossbreeding

## 1. Choose Belgian Blue, Inra 95 or Charolais...

The dairy farmer who doesn't want to raise beef breed cattle is interested in genetics for commercial crossbreeding. He looks for ease of calving but also for a good meaty type and good early muscling.

To meet these conditions, the "Charolais Excellence", Inra 95 and Belgian Blue programs are interesting.

These testing programs are intended to improve the ease of calving and the value of the crossbred calves on sale.

However, be careful with private bulls, even if they are of one of these three breeds: easy calving is not assured...

## 2. Use low quality cows....

Play the card of commercial crossbreeding with cows on which the genetic or the records don't correspond to your breeding aims. But also on cows which are late in the AI season or on cows back in season after AI : We know that the fertility rate of the AI is higher in crossbreeding.

## 3. Pick up the sires with good index...

For Charolais, the sires of the "Excellence" program have a minimum of 84 for the ease of calving and a minimum of 111 for the early muscling. Choose the sires recorded 100 and more for the ease of calving and 115 and more for the early muscling.

For the Inra 95, the suggested sires have generally an index higher than 100 for the ease of calving : It's a real security. Then look for a good index for the meaty type (around 105-120).

For the Belgian Blue, in Belgium, a specific crossbreeding program is being elaborated. The first calves are not yet born. The testing is being done for the purebred, so there is no data for the ease of calving but an index for the birth weight. On the other hand, for the meaty type, take the best index: 105 and more.

Details : these details are not always available in the catalogues of AI stations. They sometimes translate into: easy calving, very meaty calves.

## 4. Are you beginner or experienced in crossbreeding ?...

"When someone begins in crossbreeding, I advise to choose sires well-known for their ease of calving: Rossli, Mochet, Lucius, Polti. The calves are a bit lighter. Then, the experienced crossbreeders, looking well after their cows, are able to use the champions of the meaty type: Ormeaux, Lanzac or Pomardo who is really successful on our area. Obviously, the prices are higher." advises Gérard GUILLEMIN, in charge of the program "Charolais Excellence".

## **5. Bet on genetics according to the local market....**

In the South West of France, the Inra 95 crossbred cattle are really attractive. In Côtes-d'Armor, they are particularly interested in Belgian Blue crossbred cattle. In the center of France, the buyers can't resist the Charolais crossed with Montbéliard cows. So it's better to propose the locally requested product, a product that the buyers know and recognize for the high value. The challenge of the terminal crossbreeding is, above all, economic.

## **6. Favour white-coat sires...**

The dark-coat Inra 95 or Belgian Blue sires give a variable proportion of red and white, black and white or white and blue calves depending on the breed of the dam. These calves sometimes look exactly like dairy males. Their growth potential is excellent but because of their coat color, they don't give a good impression. So the buyers don't really feel like buying them for their right value.

Depending on the selection program, the data concerning the coat color of the offspring are sometimes available in the catalogues. For the Inra 95 and the Charolais this data is given in percentage of one-color or light-color coat. For the Belgian blue, choose a white-coat sire.

## **7. Manage the feeding during the drying-off of commercial cows...**

Even if the crossbreeding selection programs guarantee the security for the calving, don't take too many risks. Be careful when you feed the dried-off cows with too rich rations : at ease in his mother and well-fed, the calf gets the gestation longer and doesn't forget to put on weight. " Before the birth, a calf can put on 800 g per day" confirms Eric FRANCOIS from Genes Diffusion. A crossbred calf that is supposed to bear without any calving trouble can cause problems at calving if the ration isn't perfectly adapted. Be careful.

## **8. Raise the calves to 3-weeks old...**

At birth, these champions of crossbreeding are small: an average weight of 40-45 kg. It doesn't impress a buyer, but these calves already have a great potential. After 3 weeks on milk, they don't drink more than a dairy calf at the same age but their round shape appears. The buyers can't ignore this meaty type any more. According to the area and the markets on one side, and the type, the color and the quality of these animals on the other side, they are sold between 300€ and 650€.

## **9. Can we cross a heifer?**

It's up to the breeder. The Limousine with its small calves could do so but is it serious to cross a heifer since we don't even know the milk potential? It might be the future star of the herd and we could probably get good purebred daughters out of it...

## **10. Don't confuse early muscling and meat quality.**

In the Charolais in particular, don't confuse "early muscling" that guarantees beautiful crossbred cattle, sold at a few weeks and the "meat quality", indicating an improved production of store cattle, young bulls and steers.