

# SOUTH DEVON BREEDPLAN

## Small Herds - Obtaining effective results from BREEDPLAN

One of the most common questions asked by breeders with relatively small herds who are interested in becoming involved in BREEDPLAN is “what size herd do you need to be in BREEDPLAN?”

This is a difficult question to answer as it depends on a number of factors, however, the following article outlines how BREEDPLAN works and what breeders with small herds can do to obtain effective results from BREEDPLAN.

The basic mechanism by which BREEDPLAN works is to compare the performance of animals to other animals in the same group. Where there is only one animal in a group there is nothing that it can be compared with and therefore its performance cannot be used. Calves are only analysed in the same group if they:

- were bred in the same herd,
- are of the same sex,
- were born within 60 days of each other,
- have been run under the same conditions, and
- have been weighed on the same day.

An analysis group must therefore have a minimum of two animals that meet these criteria in order to be used in the BREEDPLAN analysis. There are a number of strategies that breeders can use to ensure that the performance of calves will be included in effective analysis groups.

1. *Restricted calving periods:* as calves are only included in the same analysis group if they are born within 60 days of one another, it is essential that small herds have as shorter calving period that is practical. (6 to 8 weeks is ideal).
2. *Run all calves under the same management conditions:* where possible all calves should be run under the same conditions and weighed on the same day. If calves are to be split into different groups it is useful to weigh the whole group before it is split. For example, it is possible to take 200 day weights anywhere between 80 and 300 days of age, so you can weigh all male calves as a group before a portion of them are castrated.
3. *Inclusion of commercial animals:* Many breeders have a small stud herd that is run in conjunction with commercial animals. If you have a commercial herd of Angus content animals, then they can be recorded with the Aberdeen Angus Cattle Society. This allows a greater number of animals to be included in the same analysis group. This can also be achieved by analysing together the performance of animals from two stud herds that are run on the same property.
4. *Use more than one sire:* Another important factor to consider is that a herd should use more than one sire in any mating program. BREEDPLAN requires at least 2 sires to be represented in an analysis group if the performance of the progeny is going to contribute to the calculation of EBVs for their sire. Where AI programs are used they should be timed so that AI sired calves are born at the same time as calves sired by natural matings.
5. *Supply recipient dam details:* Herds that run embryo transfer programs need to identify the breed and age of the recipient dams of ET calves. If the breed of recipient dams is not supplied, ET calves are split into single animal analysis groups and therefore the ET calf's own performance cannot be used. If possible, recipient dams should be of the same breed.

If you require further information or have any queries about **South Devon BREEDPLAN** please contact The South Devon Herd Book Society on 01392 447494 or e-mail [info@sdhbs.org.uk](mailto:info@sdhbs.org.uk)