

Risk of losing money if you don't select sires by NTM

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Reaching a high average NTM level in your herd is primarily an effect of using the best sires. It is easy to identify sires with high NTM, because it is available on all AI sires and published on different lists, sire magazines etc. In most cases it is also possible to buy semen from the best NTM sires - no matter if they are Nordic or foreign.

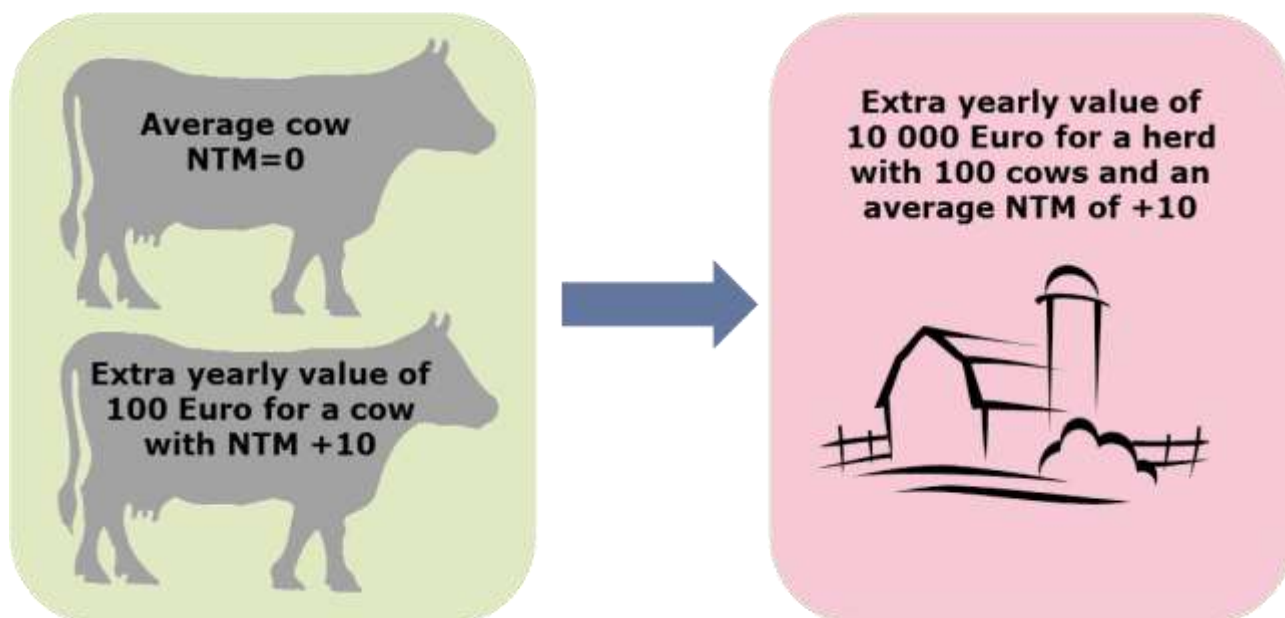
Nevertheless it happens that farmers don't use the best NTM sires of a variety of reasons. However the result in most cases, if you consequently avoid using high NTM sires, is that your herd gets a decreased economic potential compared to other herds.

NTM equals economy

NTM has an economic background, which means that cows with higher NTM perform better than cows with lower NTM. This can be through higher yield, fewer dead calves, fewer diseases, better conformation, better longevity or a combination of these and other traits of economic importance.

Better performance results in more income. A difference of 10 NTM units between 2 cows results in a higher yearly profit of 100 Euro in favor of the cow with the higher NTM. If a cow for example produces for two and a half years, the extra total profit is 250 Euro.

Breeding is an investment - a difference of 10 NTM units makes an important contribution for the profit of your dairy farm!



Don't go for an alternative breeding goal

Farmers that don't use NTM might do so because they have a different breeding goal in the herd than in the whole breed. Some farmers think that conformation traits are the key for long-living cows that produce well and only consider those traits when selecting sires for insemination. Others focus on one trait alone, for instance claw health, because they think that breeding for improved claw health can solve their problem in the herd instantly. None of these strategies are a good way of getting maximum economic progress from breeding.

Going only for conformation or other single traits will give more progress for these traits and traits that are genetically positively connected to these traits. Better udder conformation might give you longer lasting cows, but the rate of progress is lower than if you put emphasis directly on longevity. At the same time going for individual traits might give you no progress or even recession for other traits that you might also find important, but that has not got your attention right now. NTM is constructed in the way that it gives maximum economic progress and it gives positive genetic progress for all traits of economic importance.

At the same time it is important to realize that breeding is a long term process where decisions today first start to give results in 5-10 years. Selecting AI sires that gives good claw health as a tool to solve severe problems with digital dermatitis today is not a good approach. Improving management is a more successful way of solving these kinds of problems. In 5-10 years the problems can be different today. But in the long run selecting AI sires with high NTM will result in more profitable cows, partly thanks to improved genetic level for claw health.

It might be a good idea to have special focus on individual traits under special conditions -if for instance the herd has low frequency of mastitis, claw diseases or dead calves. In these cases more emphasis can be put on other traits, but it is important to choose only among the sires with the highest NTM. Setting lower limits on individual traits is a bad idea, because all sires have weak points, but not using them is a mistake, because you also miss all their strong points.

Don't go for natural service sires

Another reason for not reaching maximum possible economic progress in the herd is by using natural service sires. Natural service sires have a lower genetic level for NTM than AI sires. Further they have low reliability on breeding values, for instance for birth traits which can have large effects when used for heifers. This means that potential practical reasons for using natural service sires should be compared to reduced profit by lower NTM. And of course also the risk of injuries of farmer and employees, as well as risk that the bull is infertile.

Don't get impressed by talk and pictures – go for facts

The key message of this paper is that one should be careful when not aiming to maximize NTM. It can for instance be appealing to buy cheap semen from bulls with lower NTM value, but one has to be aware that one NTM unit reduces profit with 10 Euro per cow each year. That means that semen has to be very cheap and from a bull with only marginally lower NTM to be a good bargain compared to buying semen from the best NTM sires.

It is also important to know NTM for sires before buying semen, no matter if the sire is Nordic or foreign. Nice pictures and good salesmanship are not paying any bills. Total merit indices on foreign scales are facts, but they are not always useful under Nordic conditions and they cannot be compared to NTM.