

ESTABLISHMENT AND OPERATION OF THE INTERBULL CENTRE

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The International Bull Evaluation Service (INTERBULL) committee was formed in 1983 as a joint venture by the European Association of Animal Production (EAAP), International Dairy Federation (IDF), and International Committee of Animal Recording (ICAR) (former ICRPMA). Since 1988 INTERBULL has been a permanent subcommittee of ICAR supported by its former parent organization as well as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Currently, INTERBULL involves 28 paying member-countries.

The overall objective of INTERBULL is to co-ordinate efforts of member-countries to compare dairy bulls of all breeds on an international basis. This is achieved via facilitating communications and information exchange among countries, producing review documents on current evaluation systems, assessing and giving recommendations on methods to convert bull genetic values from one country to another, and stimulating research to further improve the accuracy of international comparisons. Yearly meetings are held, where representatives of member-countries, research stations, breed societies, and other institutes of the international dairy industry are exchanging ideas and discussing the most recent developments in their fields.

The INTERBULL Centre was established in October 1991, in Uppsala, Sweden, under a contract between INTERBULL/ICAR and the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences. The Centre is hosted by the Department of Animal Breeding and Genetics; it is financed by a grant of the Swedish Agricultural Board and Swedish Farmers' Organizations, as well as INTERBULL and various international funds as compensation for services rendered to member-countries.

The INTERBULL Centre is set as an international, independent laboratory in order to carry out the mandate of INTERBULL in view of its continuously increasing acceptability as body of reference in international bull evaluations. The specific objectives of the Centre could be summarized as follows:

- Create an international, comprehensive data base with regards to pedigree information and genetic evaluations for production as well as non-production traits of dairy bulls of

all breeds evaluated in all participating countries. This data base will be routinely updated and will become available to any member-country.

- Collect coefficients for converting foreign bull proofs computed in all participating countries and distribute them to member-countries. Also use the data base to develop own conversion formulae.
- Conduct and co-ordinate international research projects to improve methods of global bull comparisons for production and non-production traits and increase rates of genetic gain in member-countries.
- Provide technical leadership in the area of standardization of information across countries.
- Render services to individual member-countries or groups of countries or organizations regarding implementation of joint genetic evaluation schemes.

The INTERBULL Centre, carrying INTERBULLS's responsibility to provide international information on sire evaluation procedures, is currently conducting a survey on systems of genetic evaluation and breeding programmes, covering 28 major dairy producing countries. As has been done in the past, results will be published in the official INTERBULL Bulletin for international distribution.

Other activities of the INTERBULL Centre involve, in co-operation with the European Community (EC), the development of a complete data base with regards to dairy bulls from various breeds that are progeny tested in EC countries. This data base will be used in joint research projects investigating the feasibility of simultaneous bull rankings across the EC countries. Several technical questions and problems regarding implementation of such an evaluation system are going to be addressed in these projects: existence of genetic relationships and ties among different bull populations, investigation of genotype by environment interaction, heterogeneity of variance among countries, just to name a few.

Furthermore, an international, comprehensive study of genetic relationships among several red breed bull populations from various places around the world is considered. This could be the first in a series of steps dealing with the problems and seeking solutions associated with direct comparisons among different red bull populations.

Future continuation of such projects is expected with more participating countries and breed agencies from all over the world. At the same time, as research results shed light to pertinent questions and problems, routine implementation of international dairy bull genetic evaluation schemes, under the auspices of INTERBULL, should become feasible both, in several regional as well as one worldwide scale.