

The Question - Can genetic linkage be improved through the Sire Linkage Programme?

Introduction

The Sire Linkage Programme (SLP) was introduced in 2009 to increase flock connectedness and strengthen the quality of breeding evaluations.

It also offers an opportunity to provide a short-term injection of elite genetics into a breed and increase the profile of performance recording within breeds and societies.

Every year £10,000 is made available for the collection and distribution of semen from four rams.

Methods

Qualification criteria for rams

- At least **three EBVs in the top 10%** of the breed based on the latest benchmark
- Be **ultrasound scanned** or have **at least 25 progeny with ultrasound measurements**
- From a signet recorded breed with **five or more flocks recording in England**
- Additional criteria for consideration include
 - Scrapie genotype
 - Maedi Visna status
 - High accuracy in traits of interest
- There are **no age restrictions**
- Nominations are accepted in **June and September**
- Nominations can be made by breed societies, breeding groups or individual breeders
- **Two rams** can be selected at each round

Successful rams

- **£2,500** will be made available for the successful collection and distribution of **350 semen straws**
- Semen must be made available **free of charge** to any breeder wishing to use it for **three years**
- Payment of handling/shipping fees are the responsibility of the breeder wishing to use the semen

Results

Sire Linkage Programme performance (Aug 2009 – Jun 2013)	
Nominated rams	46
Successful rams (semen collected)	5
Number of semen straws collected	1750
Recorded progeny produced	619
Number of recorded flocks with progeny	32

- Five rams from three different breeds have had semen successfully collected
- Of the 32 recorded flocks with progeny, 25 are Texel flocks
- Rams from smaller breeds have struggled to distribute sufficient quantities of semen

Future Questions

How can more breeds be encouraged to nominate rams?

How can the programme accommodate smaller breeds?

Is the project achieving its goal of increased genetic linkage within breeds?

If not achieving its goal, what could be changed?

For more information or queries
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