

**Éveline André, from de Belgian Blue Herd-Book:
"98% of the births without any Caesarian section."**

Questions - In which kind of breeding programs are Belgian Blue crosses used? Based on what criteria can you choose BB bulls for terminal crossing? What about the ease of calving in crossing, what is the rate of Caesarian sections?

Answers by Eveline André from the Belgian Blue Herd-Book in Belgium.



Last year, during the market of Rennes, the BB crossbred calves were sold, at 15 days of age, between 200 and 350€. (© Web-agri)

Nathalie Petit (NP) : "In France , in which breeding program is terminal crossing with BB most often used ?"

Évelyne André, BB Herd Book (EA): "This kind of crossing is often used by dairy breeders in the West of France because it is the most economical breed, for example. The average carcass yield of the Holstein breed is 55%. At the first crossing with a BB, you increase this carcass yield by 7 to 8 %. In full-blood, this reaches between 65 to 72%, based to the conformation. Moreover, 80% of the carcass gives saleable meat. Last year, at the Rennes market, the crossbred calves of 15 days of age were sold between 200 and 350 € whereas the price of the prim'Holstein calves was 100€. Moreover, the BB doses cost a maximum 5€/straw. BB bulls are also used for natural service and particularly to produce Aveyron calves on Salers, Aubrac,..."

NP: "On which criteria would you advise dairy breeders to choose BB Bulls for the terminal crossing?"

EA: "Firstly you should know that all the bulls from the catalogues are homozygote for the mh gene, the gene for muscular hypertrophy. They transmit this gene to their descendants, who will, in turn, have a better conformation. I would advise to choose sires according to the average values of calve birth weight and gestation period. It is also better to use a "lightbone" bull. Then, the choice of colour is also important, in conjunction with the breed on which we want to cross, to have a calf with a homogenous colour. Thus, on Holstein cows, we would prefer to use a white bull whereas on Angus from England, the breeders prefer using black bulls."

NP: "What about the ease of calving? What is the rate of caesarian section?"

EA: "In crossing, the cows calve as easily as any full blood mother breed (Holstein, Salers, Aubrac, Blonde d'Aquitaine,...).. If you choose bulls which produce calves lighter than 44 kg at birth, 98% of the calvings happen naturally, without any need for caesarian. So, there is no problem with the calving, the calves being finer, with less bone than Charolais calves, for example, but with a much greater meaty potential."

NP

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