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MEEKMA'S VISION

Already the long history of the aAa system can be seen as validation that it helps farmers match the **right bull with a cow**.

Klaas Sjoerd Meekma (51)
is a milk goat farmer in Deinum,
located in Friesland, The Netherlands.
He is also a writer specializing in dairy
cattle breeding.

aAa – Still flowering after a half century

By chance last week I had contact with our aAa pioneer Jan Schilder. With two of his colleagues he analyzed some bucks at the goat AI station. Two of these bucks came from our farm and that was the reason he contacted me. The oldest breeding pairing system in the dairy industry created a half century ago by cattle breeder and classification inspector Bill Weeks has flowered as never before in The Netherlands. Weeks created his coding system identifying the six basic kinds of cow, recognizing that every cow can be a mixture of all these different types. With each of the different basic types Weeks identified characteristics showing the problems and qualities. The mating of a cow to a bull with the opposite characteristics by design results in a proper mixture of these characters so the offspring can function well.

aAa does not consider the parts individually but instead looks at all the parts in total and at their relationship to each other. It is possible here to give just one example, that of a cow with a shallow chest and unhealthy feet, where the solution can be found in a bull with a deep chest. This provides better overall blood circulation and specifically to the feet, suggesting here in is the route to a healthier animal according to aAa.

Large was the skepticism twenty years ago when Jan Schilder started analyzing with the Weeks method. How can you see with a couple of numbers how a bull breeds? The people of aAa are not against the use of breeding values to find the best bulls. However, after that you must make the best mating combinations they point out.

I still remember in the early years that Schilder and his more experienced American colleague were finally ask to analyze some bulls by breeding leaders at AI South East, despite their disbelief of the system. The fact that aAa called the Ned Boy son Hol-Stiens

Omar (aAa 165243), dairy, was directly used against them to say the system was ridiculous. Omar according to South East sired a wide dual-purpose meat milk type kind of cow. So, directly we come to one of the biggest misunderstandings about cows, says Schilder, that narrowness is called milk type or dairy quality.

The scientific community here has never taken aAa seriously and for that reason it is unlikely there will ever be a good relation between the two. Even when there was not a good relation and no communication with aAa, they did several research studies on the system. And as far as I know they never found a satisfactory result showing aAa to be of value. A couple of years ago Peter Op't Roodt from Flanders, Belgium did a research. The result was that aAa mating did not get better results than with no aAa mating. He also claimed farmers were not more satisfied with results from good matings than with bad matings. By the way this research was under the direction of CRV-Holland Genetics. And this AI company like most large AI companies in America is anti-aAa. CRV-Holland Genetics has their own bull advise program and therefore sees aAa as their competition. But still this organization for many years has had aAa analyze their bulls because many farmers ask for it.

Scientific proof or not the number of aAa users is still growing with out any help from commercial marketing. Already there are four analyzers in The Netherlands. The system has spread also to neighboring countries where five additional analyzers are working. I can not believe that aAa is nothing more than something mystical, because the system after 50 years is still being used by so many farmers. Probably that is also because it is a sympathetic system offered by cow-mad analyzers who have no ulterior motives or pressure to sell.

I made an agreement with Schilder that before the breeding season begins I will analyze some of my bucks and goats.