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BREEDPLAN Workshop with Catriona Millen

On the 5th of October 2026, the LRF, together with Catriona Millen from ABRI, hosted a fantastic BREEDPLAN Workshop for our associated breed societies.

The workshop provided valuable insight into:
- Why BREEDPLAN matters for breed development and genetic progress.
- How the BREEDPLAN process works.
- Understanding and making the most of BREEDPLAN results.
- Common questions and challenges faced by breeders.

It was an extremely informative session, giving our breed societies a better understanding of how BREEDPLAN can support breeders in making informed selection and breeding decisions. A big thank you to Catriona Millen from ABRI for sharing her expertise, and to everyone who attended and contributed to such a valuable workshop!

Highlights from the 18th Annual Stockman School

The 18th LRF Annual Stockman School lived up to its reputation as one of the premier gatherings in the livestock industry. With the theme Unlocking the Beef Value Chain this year’s event brought together over 200 delegates for three powerful days of learning, connection, and practical insight. From thought-provoking lectures to hands-on demonstrations and spirited discussions, the school delivered an experience that was both educational and inspiring.

Day 1 set an inspiring tone for the 18th LRF Stockman School – we were especially honoured and grateful to welcome the Minister of Agriculture, Mr Willie Aucamp, whose address helped set the scene for three days of learning, collaboration and meaningful discussion within the beef industry. The programme explored the outlook for the red meat industry and the evolving expectations of today's beef consumer, before turning to critical topics such as disease prevention, female reproduction and the ongoing Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) challenges facing South Africa. A panel discussion examined the future of meat trade restrictions and possible ways forward, while the day concluded with a forward-looking presentation on the future of the beef value chain. The sessions provided valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities shaping the industry.

Day 2 continued with an engaging programme focused on improving profitability and performance through nutrition, genetics and practical management. Delegates explored fetal programming and the long-term effects of cow nutrition on progeny performance, the role of BREEDPLAN in unlocking the beef value chain, and how genetic selection can improve profitability and performance. The afternoon brought theory into practice through demonstrations on selecting cattle for functional efficiency-a huge thank you to Riaan Van Zyl, from Rotswand Simbras, for bringing his beautiful cattle, making the session both practical and insightful!

Day 3 brought the Stockman School to a strong and thought-provoking close, focusing on strengthening the relationship between producers, consumers and the wider beef value chain. Sessions examined the challenges between the cow-calf and feeding and packing sectors from a producer's perspective, as well as ways to improve efficiency across the supply chain. Delegates also gained valuable insights into bull-buying behaviour and the factors influencing commercial customers' purchasing decisions. These final sessions reinforced the value of informed decision-making, efficient production and market awareness, leaving delegates with practical knowledge and fresh perspectives to apply in their own operations.

A heartfelt congratulations goes out to all our Stockman School award winners. We proudly recognized breeders who achieved 4.5 and 5-star Completeness of Performance ratings, those who won Proven Bull of the Year and Cow Group of the Year, and the winners for the Most Genetic Progress over five years. The Services to the Industry Award was presented to Mr Kobus Bester for his outstanding dedication, leadership and invaluable contribution to the livestock and cattle-breeding industry. Through his roles as Chairman of the Stud Breeders Federation (SBF), Breed Director of the Simbra Cattle Breeders’ Society of Southern Africa, and director on the LRF board, Kobus continues to play a vital role in advancing and strengthening the industry. The prestigious LRF/Santam Stud Breeder of the Year award was awarded to Mr Martiens de Jager, a Simmentaler breeder, whose commitment to genetic excellence continues to set the benchmark for the industry. Congratulations to all our winners—your dedication, innovation, and pursuit of excellence are what drive this industry forward.

To our sponsors—thank you for your unwavering support. Your contributions are the backbone of Stockman School’s continued success. To our bronze, silver, and gold sponsors, your generosity enables us to deliver a world-class program year after year. To our media sponsor, Plaas Media, your coverage and partnership help amplify the reach and impact of this event. We deeply appreciate your commitment to the livestock community and your belief in the power of education, innovation, and collaboration.

And finally, to our delegates—thank you for your participation in the LRF Stockman School. Your enthusiasm, curiosity, and willingness to engage made this year’s Stockman School truly special. We hope you left with new knowledge, meaningful connections, and a renewed passion for smart stockmanship. We look forward to welcoming you back next year for another unforgettable experience.

Veeplaas Cow Group of the Year Winners

Most Genetic Progress in the Past 5 Years Winners

Net Feed Intake Winners

Proven Bull of the Year Winners

Kobus Bester: Services to the Industry Winner

Martiens de Jager: Santam LRF Stud Breeder of the Year Winner

Monthly Tipsheet and Video Series: October Focus

We are excited to announce the next monthly tipsheet and video for our 2026 series. Each month, a one-page tipsheet and video will be released covering all the information you need to know! For September, our focus was on Embryo Transfer Calves

Access September’s one-page tipsheets and 2-minute video below to stay informed and up-to-date.

ET Calves Tipsheet **ET Calves Video**

For October, our focus is on a **BREEDPLAN’s Guide to Contemporary Groups**

What are Contemporary Groups (CG)?
- A group of animals, born within the same herd, in the same season, which have had the same opportunity to perform in a specific trait.
- It is a group of animals born in the same herd that was managed under the same conditions up until the specific trait was measured.

Why does BREEDPLAN group animals into CG's?
- To account for as many non-genetic influences on performance as possible, such as feeding, seasons and management.
- To ensure that animals with similar opportunities to perform are directly compared.
- To help distinguish differences in performance due to genetics from differences caused by environmental and management factors.
- To improve the accuracy and reliability of EBVs.
- Incorrect grouping can result in less accurate or misleading EBVs, particularly when animals receiving different levels of management are grouped together or animals are unnecessarily separated into very small groups.

How does BREEDPLAN Construct CG's?
- BREEDPLAN automatically creates the contemporary groups (CG) of animals for comparison based on the criteria outlined below:

AUTOMATIC	AUTOMATIC, BUT CAN BE BREEDER INFLUENCED	BREEDER SUPPLIED
1. Herd 2. Calving Year 3. Sex of Calf 4. Twins/Single 5. Birth Status (ET) 6. Dam Age	7. Breed 8. Weight Date 9. Calf Age (Slicing)	10. Breeder Defined Management Groups - birth - post-birth

1. Herd:
- Only calves bred and weighed in the same herd will be directly compared in the same CG.
- This herd definition can be extended to include “associated herds” which have calves bred and managed as part of a larger herd.
- The most common example is where members of a family (e.g. children) have a small number of animals registered in their own name that run as part of the main herd on the property.

2. Calving Year:
- Only animals born in the same “calving year” will be compared together in the same CG.
- Usually the calving year is the same as the year of birth of the calf.
- However, for herds whose calving period runs into the next calendar year (e.g. from November through to March), "calving year" can be specified to span the period running across two different calendar years. In these cases, a financial year is more appropriately used as the “calving year”.

3. Sex of Calf:
- Only calves of the same sex at measurement will be directly compared in the same CG.
- Therefore, bulls with bulls, heifers with heifers, steers with steers.
- Note that males that are weighed initially as bulls and then castrated will have their first weight compared with all the other males and their second weight only with the steers.

4. Number in Birth (Single/Twins):
- Only calves of the same birth number will be compared together in the same CG.
- Single calves will not be compared with twins.
- While twins can be compared with other twins, the low occurrence of twin births generally means that very little performance information from twins is used in the BREEDPLAN analysis.

5. Birth Status (ET/Natural):
- Calves conceived naturally or by AI will be directly compared together in the same CG but they will not be compared with embryo transfer (ET) calves.
- ET calves will be analysed in a separate CG.
- Furthermore, the amount of information available on the recipient dam will then determine the formation of the contemporary group for ET calves.
- ET calves will only be directly compared with other ET calves that have been reared by recipient dams of the same breed (and the recipient dam information has been recorded with the Breed Society).

6. Dam Age (Parity):
- The birth performance records for calves out of first calf heifers (up to 3.5 years of age) are not compared with birth performance records for calves out of other cows.
- NOTE - This heifer/cow distinction is only used for birth performance traits (i.e. birth weight, gestation length, days to calving).

7. Breed:
- In some BREEDPLAN analyses, only the performance records for calves of the same breed will be compared together in the same contemporary group.
- In other BREEDPLAN analyses, either:

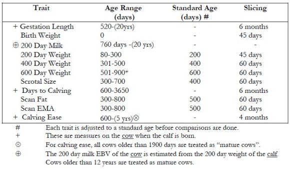
a) Only the performance for pure bred animals is included or

b) The performance from cross bred animals is included in the same CG and adjustments for heterosis are made.

8. Weigh Date:
- Only animals weighed on the same date will be compared together in the same CG.
- For example, the 400 day weight performance for two animals will only be directly compared if both the 400 day weights were recorded on the same day or any weights previously submitted to BREEDPLAN for these animals had also been recorded on the same day.

9. Calf Age:
- Only animals of similar age will be directly compared in the same CG.
- When all the other criteria have been used to place animals into a CG, the
- group is divided (sliced) into animals of similar ages.
- “Slicing” is done to ensure that the calves being compared have been run under comparable seasonal conditions.
- The following table provides an indication of the standard age slices used by BREEDPLAN:

Table 2: Standard Age Slicing and Ages for BREEDPLAN Traits



Trait	Age Range (days)	Standard Age (days) #	Slicing
+ Gestation Length	520-(20yrs)	-	6 months
Birth Weight	0	-	45 days
⊕ 200 Day Milk	760 days -(20 yrs)	-	-
200 Day Weight	80-300	200	45 days
400 Day Weight	301-500	400	60 days
600 Day Weight	501-900*	600	60 days
Scrotal Size	300-700	400	60 days
+ Days to Calving	600-3650	-	6 months
Scan Fat	300-800	500	60 days
Scan EMA	300-800	500	60 days
+ Calving Ease	600-(5 yrs)⊗	-	4 months

#	Each trait is adjusted to a standard age before comparisons are done.
+	These are measures on the cow when the calf is born.
⊗	For calving ease, all cows older than 1900 days are treated as "mature cows".
⊕	The 200 day milk EBV of the cow is estimated from the 200 day weight of the calf. Cows older than 12 years are treated as mature cows.

When to assign animals to different breeder defined management groups?

- Only animals in the same breeder defined "management group" will be directly compared in the same CG.
- There are two different forms of breeder defined management groups:

1. Birth Management Group:

- Allows breeders to describe different treatments of the cows prior to the birth of the calf.
- For example, where one group of cows have had different feed availability that may affect the birth weight, calving ease or gestation length when the calf is born.

2. Post Birth Management Group:

- Allows breeders to identify animals that have received different treatment or management following the birth of the calf.
- This treatment may be deliberate (e.g. when bulls receive supplementary feeding and others do not) or accidental (e.g. if a calf is sick).
- Providing BREEDPLAN with management group information is the responsibility of the breeder.
- By assigning animals into management groups, breeders are acting as "eyes" for the BREEDPLAN evaluation.

- Animals should be assigned into different management groups when they have not had equal opportunity to perform.
- By assigning animals into management groups, only like treated animals will be grouped together and therefore directly compared in the BREEDPLAN analysis.
- Some examples of where animals should be recorded in separate management groups are:
  - Sickness gives some calves a permanent set back.
  - Animals fed for shows or sales.
  - Animals being given growth promotants.
  - Animals reared in different paddocks in which feed is of different nutritional value.
  - Different stages of pregnancy for heifers.

How to maximise the size of CGs:

- Breeders must maximise the number of their calves represented within each CG to optimise the results from their performance recording.
- Strategies that can be implemented to achieve this.

1.Restrict calving periods:

- As calves are only included in the same CG if they are born within 45 or 60 days of one another, it is preferable if herds have as shorter calving period as practical.

2. Weigh all animals on the same day:

- As calves are only included in the same CG if they are weighed on the same date, all animals within the same management group should be weighed on the same day.

3. If you need to divide animals, use the "automatic" grouping criteria:

- Sex, age, ET calves vs non-ET, prior management groups etc.

4. Use recipient dams of same breed:

- As embryo transfer calves are only included in the same contemporary group if they are reared by a recipient dam of the same breed, it is preferable if the recipient dams used are all the same breed.

5. Run animals in as large a group as possible

Other Considerations: Maintaining genetic linkage

- It is important to maintain both genetic comparisons within each CG and between the different CG's.

Maintaining Genetic Comparisons within groups:

- Must have more than one sire with progeny represented within each CG.
- The performance information from a CG of calves that all have the same sire contributes no information on the genetic merit of the sire.

Maintain pedigree links between groups:

- The more pedigree links between the different CG's, the more reliable the EBVs.
- This is because we use the pedigree links to compare between the groups.

Therefore, try to:

- Remix your cows from one year's joining to the next (i.e. don't keep cows in the same mob every year).
- Replace sires gradually (ensure you can directly compare the progeny of the new sire(s) with progeny of a sire used previously).
- Split a sire's heifer progeny between several bulls when these heifers are being mated. This is important for the estimation of the Milk EBVs.

Access October's one-page tipsheets and 5-minute video below to stay informed and up-to-date.

CG Tipsheet

CG Video

LRF Online Courses

We are excited to announce the next free LRF online course for November on Using BREEDPLAN for bull selection.

Date: 24 November 2026
Time: 17:30 - 18:30
Topic: Using BREEDPLAN for bull selection
Presenter(s): Reimo and Sonja Schneider

RSVP by filling out the Google Form using the link below:

RSVP to Novembers Course

HerdMASTER and BREEDPLAN News:

HerdMASTER:
HerdMASTER Online Is Here – Closed Beta Registrations Now Closed! Thank you to everyone who signed up to participate in the Closed Beta testing for BreedLOGIC Herd, the next evolution of herd management!

Registrations for the test phase are now officially closed.

To Our Registered Beta Testers:
If you registered for the Closed Beta, it's time to take BreedLOGIC Herd for a spin! Whether you are working from the office, on your laptop, in the bakkie, or at the yards on your phone, you can now access your herd data anywhere, anytime.

Get started with these quick walkthrough videos:

How to Register & Create Your Database

Getting Around the Platform

What's Next?
Feedback Survey: The Beta testing period runs through mid-November. Following the testing phase, we will send out a feedback survey to gather your thoughts, suggestions, and operational needs. Please make sure to test the platform thoroughly so you can share your valuable input!

Full Rollout: The final official release is scheduled for early 2027, bringing zero-installation browser access, direct breed society exports, and unified BreedLOGIC logins to all users.

Thank you for helping us shape the future of herd management!