

**SELECTION AND MATING STRATEGIES
RISKS AND REWARDS**

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February 1996

*A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the
University of New England*

Certificate

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

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Signature

Acknowledgements

This thesis has been undertaken in two main stages - primarily at the Animal Genetics Breeding Unit at the University of New England, where the majority of the research was undertaken, then while in my current position in the Queensland Department of Primary Industries in Brisbane. While the latter period mainly involved the completion of the thesis I am grateful to several people who have assisted in reaching this point, as well as the brief assistance through the Department's SARAS scheme. I would particularly like to thank Shaun Coffey for his encouragement and support, and John Childs for providing the time to finalise the thesis.

My supervisors Brian Kinghorn and Steve Barwick have stimulated my thinking and provided valued input and encouragement throughout with flexibility and tolerance. I also thank Brian for his early push to get material published and the final push to actually finish.

My time at AGBU was interesting, with valued interactions with many of the staff, visiting scientists and other students. As well as the friendship, and stimulation, this contributed to the work. I would like to thank Johan van Arondonk for input and discussion on the final stage of the research in Chapter 4.

The greatest impact from study and working has been on my family. I hope that it has been worth it and I appreciate the long term support and tolerance from Athol and the interested, occasional input from Daniel and Joanna.

I would also like to thank David Akers and the staff of the PhD office in UNE. On the several occasions I have had to deal with them their efficiency, commitment and approachability to the students that they support was reassuring and helpful.

The work in this thesis was undertaken with the financial support of the Australian Meat Research Corporation. This is recognised and appreciatively acknowledged. I hope that my broad involvement in the industry justifies this support.

Table of Contents

CERTIFICATE	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	ix

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.2 RISK IN THE SELECTION PROCESS	3
1.3 OBJECTIVES	6

CHAPTER 2

UTILITY AND RISK IN SELECTION : ECONOMIC AND GENETIC PERSPECTIVES	8
2.1 INTRODUCTION	8
2.2 DEFINITION OF THE BREEDING OBJECTIVE	10
2.2.1 Profit vs Utility Maximisation	11
2.2.2 Utility and Merit	12
2.2.3 Applications of Utility to Animal Breeding	14
2.2.3.1 The Expected Utility Model (EUM)	17
2.2.4 Risk and Uncertainty	19
2.2.4.1 The Use of Risk in Animal Breeding	20
2.3 GENETIC COMPONENTS OF MERIT	22
2.3.1 Introduction	22
2.3.2 Best Linear Unbiased Prediction	23
2.3.3 Inbreeding	25
2.3.4 Accuracy	30
2.3.5 Managing Response - the Impact of Selection	33
2.4 METHODS OF ANALYSIS	39
2.4.1 Introduction	39
2.4.2 Linear Programming	40
2.4.2.1 The Linear Programming Model	40
2.4.2.2 Construction of the Model	42
2.4.2.3 The Primal Dual Formulation	43
2.4.3 Integer Programming (IP)	47
2.4.4 Portfolio Analysis	49
2.4.5 Mean Of Total Absolute Deviations (MOTAD)	52
2.5 APPLICATIONS - THE SELECTION OF MATES	54
2.5.1. Introduction	54
2.5.2 Definition of Mate Selection	55
2.5.3 Applications in Animal Breeding	56
2.6 DISCUSSION	60

CHAPTER 3	
THE VALUE OF ACCURACY IN MAKING SELECTION DECISIONS	61
3.1 INTRODUCTION.....	61
3.2 METHOD.....	62
3.2.1 <i>The Simulated Population</i>	64
3.2.1.1 Indexes and their evaluation.....	65
3.2.1.2 Utility Relationship.....	66
3.3 RESULTS.....	70
3.3.1 <i>The Effect on Response</i>	70
3.3.2 <i>The Effect on Utility</i>	71
3.3.3 <i>The Effect on Ranking</i>	74
3.4 DISCUSSION.....	75
CHAPTER 4	
THE JOINT REGULATION OF GENETIC GAIN AND INBREEDING UNDER MATE SELECTION.....	82
4.1 INTRODUCTION.....	82
4.2 METHODS.....	84
4.2.1 <i>Portfolio Analysis and the Breeding Value - inbreeding Frontier</i>	84
4.2.2 <i>Adapted MOTAD</i>	86
4.2.3 <i>The Simulation Model</i>	88
4.2.4 <i>Treatments</i>	90
4.3 RESULTS.....	91
4.4 DISCUSSION.....	97
CHAPTER 5	
THE COMPARISON AND RANKING OF SELECTION STRATEGIES.....	99
5.1 INTRODUCTION.....	99
5.2 METHOD.....	102
5.2.1 <i>The Benefit Cost Model</i>	103
5.2.1.1 The Decision Rule.....	103
5.2.1.2 Identification of Benefits and Costs.....	105
5.3 RESULTS.....	107
5.4 DISCUSSION.....	117
CHAPTER 6	
GENERAL DISCUSSION	119
6.1 INTRODUCTION.....	119
6.2 THE SELECTION PROCESS.....	120
6.2.1 <i>Objectives</i>	120
6.2.2 <i>Management of Impacts</i>	123
6.3 IS INBREEDING THE PROBLEM ?.....	126
6.4 CONCLUSION	128
REFERENCES.....	129

List of Figures

Figure 2.1	The E-V Efficient Frontier, where the point A has the same variance as all points on the line, but the maximum highest mean	50
Figure 3.1	Flowchart of the simulation	63
Figure 3.2	Illustration of the simulated populations (N=300) for (a) population type A (accuracy in range 0.0 to 1.0) and (b) type B (accuracy 0.5 to 1.0). Also shown are selection functions for (a) $b=0$, $b=+3$ and (b) $b=0$, $b=-3$, for six animals selected.	68
Figure 3.3	Risk averse ($A_1 - A_3$), risk preferring ($P_1 - P_3$) and risk neutral (N) utility curves used. The parameters X_A and X_B associated with curves $A_1 - A_3$ are $X_A = 1.0$ and $X_B = 2.0, 3.0$ and 4.5 , and for curves $P_1 - P_3$, $X_A = 2.0, 3.0$ and 4.5 and $X_B = 1.0$.	69
Figure 3.4	Mean Response and mean $\pm \sigma$, for population types A (a) and B (b) with the selection of 1 animal from 300 candidates.	73
Figure 3.5	The relative utility for the major utility curves (medium levels U_2 and U_5 excluded) for one animal selected and population Types A (a) and B (b).	75
Figure 3.6	Illustration of the extent of change in ranking of animals for true breeding value when ranked on indices with weightings on accuracy of 0, 1.0 or -1.0 for population types A (a and c) and B (b and d).	79

Figure 4.1	An example of an E-V efficient frontier for a portfolio analysis. Here, point A represents a portfolio with maximum value for a set level of variance. Portfolios with the same variance but lesser means are shown on the dashed line.	85
Figure 4.2	The BV-F frontier at 5, 10, 15 and 20 years. The right hand point on each curve is the maximum level of aggregate breeding value, and the associated aggregate inbreeding level, from the best combination of matings, where inbreeding is not considered. Very small allowed reductions in aggregate breeding value and resulting levels of inbreeding are shown for other points on the curve.	85
Figure 4.3	Simulated change in mean true breeding value for different selection strategies.	93
Figure 4.4	Simulated change in mean inbreeding level for different selection strategies.	94
Figure 4.5	Simulated changes in mean inbreeding level and breeding value for different selection strategies, in the form of realised BV-F frontiers after 5, 10, 15 and 20 years of selection.	97
Figure 5.1	The change in value (ranking) of selection strategies for varying levels of b , the weight of inbreeding, where $r = .06$, Model A.	110
Figure 5.2	The change in value (ranking) of selection strategies for varying levels of b , the weight of inbreeding, where $r = .10$, Model B	112
Figure 5.3	The change in value (ranking) of selection strategies for varying levels of b , the weight of inbreeding, where $r = .06$, Model B	114
Figure 5.4	The change in value (ranking) of selection strategies for varying levels of b , the weight of inbreeding, where $r = .10$, Model B.	116

List of Tables

Table 3.1	Index weightings on accuracy defining a plateau response region within 1% and 5 % of the maximum response. The range is defined by lower (L) and upper (U) bounds.	71
Table 3.2	The optimal index weights for the simulation.	72
Table 3.3	Sires from 1991 Poll Hereford Genetic Evaluation Report Semen Buyer's Guide, showing ebv_{600day} , accuracy, r , and price/registration (dollars).	80
Table 3.4	Example showing the index weighting required to changed the ranking of pairs (above diagonal) and the associated price change (below diagonal) of such a variation.	81
Table 4.1	Average breeding values (standard errors), at 5 year intervals for simulated selection strategies	95
Table 4.2	Average inbreeding coefficients (standard errors), at 5 year intervals, for simulated selection strategies * ($h^2=.2$).	96
Table 5.1	The NPV (standard error) of selection strategies for Model A for varying weights on inbreeding, b , and interest rate, r .06.	109
Table 5.2	The NPV (standard error) of selection strategies for Model A for varying weights on inbreeding, b , and for an interest rate, r .10.	111
Table 5.3	The NPV (standard error) of selection strategies for Model B for varying weights on inbreeding, b , and interest rate r .06.	113
Table 5.4	The NPV (standard error) of selection strategies for Model B for varying weights on inbreeding, b , and interest rate, r .10.	115

Abstract

Best Linear Unbiased Prediction provides a valuable mechanism through which effective selection practices can operate, potentially enhancing performance and producing significant increases in productivity and thus, frequently in profitability. However, current recognition of the potential risks associated with this enhanced performance through the impacts of risks such as inbreeding depression, offer a challenge to the effectiveness with which selection can operate.

The broadening of the selection objective to address issues of risk in the selection process as described in this thesis integrates genetic objectives with economic perspectives. This is addressed through several areas. An initial consideration of this impact of accuracy in the selection process is undertaken from a single generational perspective. Longer term selection is addressed through the analysis of a range of selection and mating strategies including mate selection strategies that integrate increased genetic merit with the control of inbreeding (or similar risk factors). An assessment of long term strategies is undertaken through an adapted use of benefit cost methodology.

Accuracy in Selection

A stochastic simulation was carried out to investigate the impact of using an index of ebvs and accuracy on genetic response and utility. Two population types were considered based on the range of accuracy used (Type A: 0 - 1.0 and B: 0.5 - 1.0). Five hundred replications were carried out leading to the evaluation of the sample mean response and its variance. The index weightings defining plateau within 1% and 5 % of the maximum response were identified, these suggesting that for population types A and B, minimal loss in response will occur if weightings on accuracy of up to

$\pm 0.5\sigma$ and $\pm 1.5\sigma$ are selected (where σ is the standard deviation of the true breeding value). These weightings result in relatively minor changes in the rankings of animals, particularly where only a small number of animals are selected. Utility was defined as a function of the mean and variance of the sample response.

The index weightings leading to the maximal utility were identified for seven utility functions (three risk averse, three risk preferring and one risk neutral function). Placing some weight on accuracy when making selection decisions can be done with little compromise in expected mean response. This gives the opportunity to reflect risk preferring or risk averse attitudes through the use of negative or positive weightings on accuracy. However, it seems that somewhat extreme utility functions are required before this opportunity can result in significant benefit.

Mate Selection Strategies

Stochastic simulation was used to evaluate a range of selection strategies with respect to both additive genetic response and inbreeding. Strategies involving selection on BLUP ebvs or individual phenotype, followed by random mating, were compared with mate selection which used portfolio analysis to give joint consideration to genetic merit and inbreeding. An adapted Mean Of Total Absolute Deviations (MOTAD) method was used in a mate selection model to define optimal matings with regard to aggregate genetic merit and inbreeding for a base population h^2 of 0.2. Compared with random mating following selection on BLUP ebvs, inbreeding levels after 10 years of selection were able to be reduced under BLUP plus mate selection from ~0.23 to as little as 0.11. Additive genetic gain was either little compromised or increased.

The results suggest that information linking expected levels of genetic merit and inbreeding can be used to find the preferred selection strategy.

Benefit Cost Assessment

The Benefit Cost approach provides an effective mechanism through which the comparison of selection strategies for multiple objectives measured over an implementation period can be undertaken.

The strategies were compared across a range of weightings on inbreeding (linked to decline in response). The results showed a preference for MS_0 (a mate selection option with no loss in response) over the selection and mating strategy (P_r) - however this preference was mediated when the additional cost of managing mate selection was taken into account and the weighting on inbreeding was low. Interestingly, the relative value of the MS_5 strategy was seen across all alternatives. This marked a reasonable point at which the benefits from reduced inbreeding might outweigh the costs associated with some decline in potential response.

While this analysis was undertaken for two levels of interest rate (0.6 and 1.0) and for two variations in the model, with one including an additional weighting on mate selection strategies to reflect the additional management costs they impose, the final results were not highly sensitive to these factors, indicating the strength of this approach for this assessment.