

Farmers' perceptions on parameters defining suckler cow efficiency



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Some traits are typically included in beef cattle breeding programs (economic importance, easy measurement or good heritability) ... but maybe others are also important in farmers' view

MATERIAL & METHODS

Direct survey to 53 suckler cattle farmers in mountain areas (Central Pyrenees, Spain):

- general aspects of farm structure and management
- importance of several traits associated to cow productive efficiency



- age at first calving
- calving ease
- fertility
- lifetime productivity
- calf weight at birth
- calf weight at 90 days
- calf weight at weaning
- calf carcass conformation
- cow size
- cow udder conformation
- feet and leg morphology
- docility
- use of low quality feedstuffs
- others?

➔ Comparisons among

- farm size
< 65 vs. > 65 dams (49% vs. 51%)
- type of marketed product
weaned vs. fattened calf (75% vs. 25%)
- predominant cow breed
autochthonous vs. imported (91% vs. 9%)
(GLM, Chi-square)

- scored in a Likert scale 1 to 5 (1-not important to 5-very important)
- is the trait registered and provided to breeders associations? (yes/no)

RESULTS

- 85% of the farmers belong to breeder associations but **only 21% provide data** for their breeding schemes

• Most traits registered by <50% farmers

- mainly in large farms (>65 cows)
- cow breed and marketed product: not significant

• Most traits considered fairly or very important

✓ recorded and included in breeding schemes:

calving ease, calf birth weight

✗ important but not recorded:

**cow udder, feet and leg conformation
docility, calf carcass conformation**

✗ important but not included in current schemes:

**fertility, lifetime productivity
age at first calving**

✗ included in breeding schemes but regarded by farmers as less important:

calf weight at 90 days and weaning

	Registered (yes/no)	Importance (1 to 5)
Calving ease	30%	4.9
Fertility	32%	4.6
Cow udder conformation	4%	4.3
Docility	2%	4.3
Lifetime productivity	21%	4.3
Feet and leg morphology	2%	4.2
Calf carcass conformation	4%	4.0
Calf weight at birth	28%	4.0
Age at first calving	51%	3.9
Calf weight at weaning	9%	3.6
Use of low quality feedstuffs	0%	3.4
Calf weight at 90 days	2%	3.1
Cow size	2%	2.9

- farm size: large farms rated cow size and docility higher
- marketed product: not significant
- predominant breed: autochthonous rated *calving ease* higher

Cow functional traits are considered by farmers as fairly to very important for production efficiency, although their engagement in providing data for the breeding programs is low. In order to include these traits in the breeding goals, easy measuring protocols should be developed, and data recording and delivery facilitated.

