

Exploring farmer attitudes and preferences to inform the development and implementation of breeding

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Farmers' attitudes towards genetic improvement tools, and the consideration to farmers' preferences for improvements in animal traits in its design, are key drivers of uptake and of farmer participation in breeding programmes. In recent years, farmers' attitudes and views about genetic improvement, their trait preferences, and the link between these and implementation and application of genetic improvement programmes have gained increasing importance. The determination of farmers' trait preferences is not trivial and therefore many different methods and approaches have been used to analyse them. On the other hand, farmers' attitudes towards breeding tools have only been specifically studied in few occasions. We present and critically discuss the different approaches and methods that have been used to date to explore farmer's attitudes towards breeding tools and to analyse their trait preferences. We present two works as a framework for the discussion. The first work focuses on the analysis of Australian dairy farmers' preferences for improvements in cow traits to inform the 2014 review of the national breeding objective for the Australian dairy industry. The results of this work have been published elsewhere. The second work focused the development of a standard method to assess farmers' attitudes towards genetic improvement tools, which aim to tackle the lack of a reference measure of attitudes in this regard. The tool will allow to benchmark attitudes over time, and across different groups of farmers. It consists of a fixed set of attitudinal statements that comprises all the attitudinal positions existing in the animal breeding discourse. Farmers score the statements based on their agreement with them and their answers determine their attitude toward breeding tools. The set of statements is the core of a survey which also includes other additional data about the farm and the farmer. The survey has been tested with 4 sheep breeds and 10 beef breeds farmers in Australia, New Zealand and Spain and 625 surveys have been collected. We present the tool, analyse the results of the survey comparing farmer's attitudes across breeds, livestock species, countries, and discuss how farming system and farmer profile influence farmers' attitudes towards genetic improvement tools.

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