

# Nordic Cattle Genetic Evaluation

## **NAV routine Beef x Dairy genetic evaluation – data and genetic models**

**NAV**

**January 2022**

**1<sup>st</sup> edition**

# Contents

Introduction .....	3
NBDI - Nordic Beef x Dairy Index .....	4
Traits in NBDI.....	4
Economic values in NBDI .....	4
Calculation of NBDI .....	4
Correlation between NBDI and sub-indices .....	5
References.....	5
Birth .....	6
Trait definitions .....	6
Basic editing rules.....	6
Genetic evaluation.....	7
Model.....	7
Genetic parameters .....	7
Index .....	7
Correlation between the birth index and underlying traits .....	8
Effect of 10 index units .....	8
References.....	8
Growth .....	8
Trait definitions .....	8
Basic editing rules.....	9
Genetic evaluation.....	9
Model.....	9
Genetic parameters .....	9
Index .....	10
Correlation between the growth index and the underlying traits .....	10
Expected effect of the breeding values.....	11
References.....	11
Expression and standardization.....	11
Standardization .....	11
Mean of the relative breeding values .....	11
Standard deviation of the relative breeding values .....	12

## Introduction

Beef semen is used intensively in dairy herds. Nordic breeding values for beef AI bulls used on dairy cattle are based on phenotypes from beef x dairy offspring in Denmark, Sweden, and Finland. The breeding values are calculated jointly by NAV (Nordic Cattle Genetic Evaluation), which is owned by SEGES, Växa Sverige and FABA Co-op.

This cooperation and joint evaluation make it possible to compare AI beef sires for use in dairy herds across beef breeds and countries. The genetic evaluation was introduced in December 2018. The traits are included in a Nordic Beef x Dairy Index (NBDI), which was introduced in November 2019. NBDI is a tool for the dairy farmer to select beef bulls that will give the most profitable crossbred calves.

The genetic evaluation system in NAV complies with international rules for registration, documentation, calculations, etc.

In this publication, we wish to describe the methods and models used in the joint Nordic Beef x Dairy genetic evaluation.

January 2022

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## NBDI - Nordic Beef x Dairy Index

The Nordic Beef x Dairy Index (NBDI) describes a beef bull's genetic potential for producing crossbred beef x dairy offspring that give the farmers the best economy. It is composed of sub-indices for birth and growth. In the Nordic countries different fattening periods are used in practice. The length of the fattening period affects the economic values of the growth traits. Therefore, beef bulls get two indices for growth and two NBDI depending on fattening period short (age at slaughter < 550 days) or long (age at slaughter > 550 days).

### Traits in NBDI

Economic values take into account differences in age at slaughter and consequently differences in carcass weight, but also differences in price models for EUROP form and fatness.

- **NBDI, long**, includes birth index and growth index, long
- **NBDI, short**, includes birth index and growth index, short

How the different breeding values are combined into NBDI is the result of thorough economic calculations and expectations on future production conditions and price relations.

### Economic values in NBDI

The input for the calculation model is a set of economic and biological assumptions.

For the calculation of economic value of improving beef cattle traits a standard scenario was used. This is a conventional herd with a culling rate of 32%, 50% of replacement heifers born by sexed semen and 70–75% of the older cows inseminated with beef sires. The economic values are calculated in a modified version of the NTM model from 2018 – see <https://www.nordicebv.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2018.11.06-NTM-2018-report-Full.pdf>.

The results are expressed per crossbred calf. The economic values presented are the effect of improving a trait of the beef sire with one unit. The effect is the value per crossbred calf born.

In table 1 is the value of improving the traits of the beef sire traits with one phenotypic unit under different production circumstances.

Table 1. Value of improving phenotypic traits of beef sires used in dairy herds. Value per crossbred calf under different production circumstances. Average across dam breeds.

Economic values/unit	Short fattening period	Long fattening period
Daily carcass gain (€ per kg/day)	251.7	350.4
Carcass conformation score (€ per point)	2.4	8.9
Fat score (€ per point)	3.9	-11.4
Survival, later (€ per calf) <sup>1</sup>	263,9	263,9
Calving ease, later (€ per point) <sup>1+2</sup>	53.5	53.5

<sup>1</sup> Assumption that no beef x dairy crossbreds are born at 1st calving

<sup>2</sup> Includes cost of cow mortality in early lactation due to difficult calving

### Calculation of NBDI

NBDI is calculated by weighting the EBVs for each sub-index (explained above).

NBDI is calculated as shown in the formulas below. The weights used for each standardized sub-trait are shown in Table 2.

Beef AI sires:

$$NBDI = 0 + \sum_{i=1}^n (breeding\ value(i) - 100) \times weight\ factor(i)$$

were

- Breeding value<sub>i</sub> = Breeding value of the i<sup>th</sup> trait
- Weight factor<sub>i</sub> = The weight factor for the i<sup>th</sup> trait

NBDI is standardized to have an average of zero and a standard deviation of 10. The standardization of the indices in NBDI is described in the later chapter “Expression and standardization”.

Table 2. NBDI weight factors.

	NBDI, short	NBDI, long
Birth	1.08	1.01
Growth, long		1.07
Growth, short	0.79	

The main traits in NBDI, namely Birth and Growth index, are calculated as shown in the formulas below. The weights used for each standardized sub-trait are shown in Table 3.

$$Main\ traits = 100 + \sum_{i=1}^n (breeding\ value(i) - 100) \times weight\ factor(i)$$

NBDI is published if a bull has official indices for Birth and Growth.

### Correlation between NBDI and sub-indices

The expected change for each sub-index when NBDI is selected for, is expressed as a percentage of the maximum change for that index and is shown in Table 3. Maximum change is obtained if selection is based solely on the trait in question.

Table 3. Expected change for each NBDI sub-trait represented by the (within-breed) correlation between NBDI and each sub-index.

	NBDI, short	NBDI, long
Growth, short	0.45	0.51
Growth, long	0.31	0.69
Birth	0.63	0.37

### References

- [2019.10.14-TMI-of-beef-sires-used-for-dairy-crosses.pdf \(nordicebv.info\)](#)
- [2018.11.06-NTM-2018-report-Full.pdf \(nordicebv.info\)](#)

## Birth

The birth index includes two breeding values, survival, and calving ease, both in later lactations, weighted together according to their economic value. The index for birth describes a bull's crossbred offspring's genetic potential to be born easily and alive. The breeding values are based on calving records from later lactations and correlated information from primiparous calving's.

### Trait definitions

Records from the first to tenth calving are included and are referred to as first versus later calving's, respectively. Only direct effects are estimated for all traits.

The traits are survival (SU) within the first 24 hours, calving ease (CE) and calf size (CS). Survival is registered as 0 or 1, calving ease is measured in 4 categories (2 categories in SWE up to 2012), and calf size is measured in 4 classes (only DNK data). Calf size is only used as an indicator trait.

Table 4. Abbreviations and definitions of traits included in evaluation of calving traits.

Abbreviation	Definition
CSU, 1 <sup>st</sup> calving (CSU <sub>1</sub> )/SU, ≥ 2 <sup>nd</sup> calving (CSU <sub>≥2</sub> )	Survival in the first 24 hours after birth for heifers and cows separately (recoded to 2 classes for all countries)
CE, 1 <sup>st</sup> calving (CE <sub>1</sub> )/CE, ≥ 2 <sup>nd</sup> calving (CE <sub>≥2</sub> )	calving ease for heifers and cows separately (recoded to 4 classes for all countries)
CSI, 1 <sup>st</sup> calving (CSI <sub>1</sub> )/CS, ≥ 2 <sup>nd</sup> calving (CSI <sub>≥2</sub> )	Size for heifers and cows separately (only DK; 4 classes)

### Basic editing rules

For all traits a general editing is done. Calves are included if they are:

1. Born in Denmark, Sweden, or Finland 2000 and onwards
2. Born by a purebred dairy dam of the breed RDC, Holstein or Jersey
3. Sired by a beef AI sire
4. Born in a milk producing herd

The purpose of these edits is to ensure that data reflect future commercial production circumstances for beef production by beef × dairy crossbreds. In particular, the edits avoid inclusion of data from herds switching from dairy to beef production.

The general editing rules are followed by a specific editing for birth traits:

- Records for twin calves were deleted
- Records with dam age at birth lower than 15 months or above 121 months are deleted
- Finnish calving ease data from before 2003 was deleted.
- Records with deviating gestation length are excluded (Finland only).

### Pre-adjustment

All traits were pre-adjusted for heterogeneous variance within subclasses of country – calving year (5-year periods)- dam breed.



## Correlation between the birth index and underlying traits

The expected progress for each trait, when birth index is selected for, expressed as the proportion of maximum progress for that trait (Table 7). The maximum progress is obtained if selection is solely based on the trait in question. The results are based sires born 2007-2010.

Table 7. Correlations between index for birth index and breeding values for calf survival and calving ease.

Index	Correlation
CSU <sub>1</sub>	0.95
CE <sub>1</sub>	0.95
CSU <sub>≥2</sub>	0.93
CE <sub>≥2</sub>	0.96

## Effect of 10 index units

The effect of the subindices in birth expressed on the original scale is shown in Table 8. It is expressed as the difference in performance of two progeny groups, where there is a difference of 1 index units in the sires.

Table 8. Effect of 1 index unit larger EBV for a beef bull on phenotypic performance of BxD crossbred progeny. Average in parentheses

Index	Scale	Denmark	Finland	Sweden	High values mean
CSU <sub>1</sub>	%	0.297 (91.3)	0.295 (92.4)	0.236 (95.3)	Less stillborn calves
CE <sub>1</sub>	Points	0.0107	0,0104	0.0082	Less difficult calvings
CSU <sub>≥2</sub>	%	0.100 (96.3)	0.120 (95.6)	0.100 (96.9)	Less stillborn calves
CE <sub>≥2</sub>	Points	0.0052	0,0058	0.0045	Less difficult calvings

## References

[BxD final report.pdf \(nordicebv.info\)](#)

[2019.10.14-TMI-of-beef-sires-used-for-dairy-crosses.pdf \(nordicebv.info\)](#)

## Growth

The growth index (short or long) includes three breeding values; daily carcass gain, carcass conformation score and carcass fat score, combined with economic weights.

The index for growth describes a bull's crossbred offspring's genetic potential for daily carcass gain, carcass conformation score and carcass fat score. The breeding values are based on slaughter results from male and female crossbred calves raised with either a long, extensive fattening period of at least 550 days or a short, intensive fattening period.

## Trait definitions

Daily carcass gain is based on combining breeding values for bulls and heifers with short (CGS) and long (CGL) fattening period, respectively, with equal weights. Conformation (CS) and fat (FS) score are based on combining breeding values for bulls and heifers with equal weights. Carcass conformation score is recorded following the EUROP system in 15 ordered classes. All three countries use the same scale. Carcass fat score is recorded in 15 classes in Finland and Sweden and 5 classes in Denmark. The Swedish fat scores are divided by 3 to harmonize with the Danish and Finnish data. Trait abbreviations are shown in Table 9.



Table 9. Abbreviations and definitions of traits included in evaluation of growth.

Abbreviation	Definition
CGS	Daily carcass gain, Short fattening period, up to 550 days
CGL	Daily carcass gain, Long fattening period, more than 550 days
CCS	Carcass conformation score (15 classes)
CFS	Carcass fat score (FI and SE 15 classes, DK 5 classes)

## Basic editing rules

For all traits a general editing is done. Calves are included if they are:

1. Born in Denmark, Sweden, or Finland 2000 and onwards
2. Born by a purebred dairy dam of the breed RDC, Holstein or Jersey
3. Sired by a purebred beef AI sire of one of the major beef breeds
4. Born on at a milk producing herd.

The purpose of these edits is to ensure that data reflect future commercial production circumstances for beef production by beef x dairy crossbreds. In particular, the edits avoid inclusion of data from herds switching from dairy to beef production.

The general editing rules are followed by a specific editing for carcass traits:

- Calves slaughtered younger than 200 days of age or older than 900 days of age are deleted
- Calves with a dam younger than 570 days or older than 3.370 days are deleted
- Daily carcass gains larger than 1 kg/day were set to missing
- For Denmark, calf's with less than 90 days in slaughter herd, slaughter data is set to missing.

## Pre-adjustment

All traits were pre-adjusted for heterogeneous variance within subclasses of country – year – sex – dam breed.

## Genetic evaluation

### Model

A multitrait and multibreed sire model is used. Separate breeding values are estimated for males and females. Below are the effects in the model:

- Country – slaughter herd – year of birth of crossbred fixed
- Country – year – month of slaughter of crossbred fixed
- Country – age of dam of crossbred fixed
- Breed – year of birth of dam fixed
- Breed of (beef) sire fixed
- Sire random
- Residual random

No heterosis effect is included in the model, and the EBV expresses the sum of additive effect and effect of heterosis that can be observed in beef x dairy crossbred offspring.

## Genetic parameters

The parameters used in the genetic evaluation for carcass traits are shown in Table 10.

Table 10. Estimated genetic parameters for carcass traits<sup>1</sup>: heritability on the diagonal and genetic correlations above the diagonal.

		Male traits				Female traits			
		CGS	CGL	CCS	CFS	CGS	CGL	CCS	CFS
Male	CGS	<b>0.19</b>	0.97	0.30	-0.21	0.83	0.86	0.22	-0.27
	CGL		<b>0.21</b>	0.34	-0.10	0.85	0.86	0.25	-0.21
	CCS			<b>0.32</b>	-0.17	0.31	0.24	0.92	-0.12
	CFS				<b>0.23</b>	-0.20	-0.13	-0.19	0.88
Female	CGS					<b>0.33</b>	0.97	0.35	-0.30
	CGL						<b>0.32</b>	0.25	-0.22
	CCS							<b>0.35</b>	-0.18
	CFS								<b>0.25</b>

<sup>1</sup> CGS = daily carcass gain, short fattening period; CGL = daily carcass gain, long fattening period; CCS = carcass conformation score; CFS = carcass fat score

## Index

The growth index (short or long) includes three breeding values: daily carcass gain, carcass conformation score and carcass fat score, combined according to their economic weights. Index for daily carcass gain is calculated as average of short and long period for both sexes (4 traits). Index for carcass conformation score and index for carcass fat score are calculated as average of subindexes for both sexes. Effect of “Breed of sire” from the genetic model is added to the EBV’s for the individual bulls before standardization. The standardization of the breeding values is described in the chapter “Expression and standardization”.

The standardized EBVs for carcass gain, conformation score and fat score are combined by weight factors (Table 11).

Table 11. Weight factors in calculation of growth index (short and long)

	Growth, short	Growth, long
Daily carcass gain	0.96	0.65
Carcass conformation score	0.24	0.51
Carcass fat score	0.10	-0.26

Index is published for a bull, if reliability for CCS is above 50 % or number of BxD offspring for CCS is at least 500.

## Correlation between the growth index and the underlying traits

The expected progress of each trait, when growth index is selected for, expressed as a proportion of maximum progress for that trait, is shown in Table 12. The maximum progress is obtained if selection is solely based on the trait in question.

Table 12. Correlation between the growth index and indices for carcass gain, classification score and fat score.

Index	Growth, short	Growth, Long
CGS, male	0.95	0.73
CGS, female	0.94	0.74
CGL, male	0.96	0.73

CGL, female	0.93	0.68
CCS, male	0.26	0.65
CCS, female	0.23	0.63
CFS, male	-0.12	-0.50
CFS, female	-0.27	-0.58

## Expected effect of the breeding values

The effect of subindices in growth expressed on the original scale is shown in Table 13. It is expressed as the difference in performance of two progeny groups, where there is a difference of 1 index units in the sires.

Table 13. Effect of 1 index unit larger EBV for a beef bull on phenotypic performance of BxD crossbred progeny. Average in parentheses.

Trait, sex and rearing period	Scale	Denmark	Finland	Sweden	High values mean
Daily carcass gain, males, short	g/day	1.4 (677)	1.5 (656)	1.4 (645)	Higher growth rate
Daily carcass gain, females, short	g/day	1.5 (569)	1.4 (486)	1.7 (474)	Higher growth rate
Daily carcass gain, males, long	g/day	-	1.3 (633)	1.4 (587)	Higher growth rate
Daily carcass gain, females, long	g/day	-	1.3 (443)	1.0 (407)	Higher growth rate
Carcass score, males	EUROP	0.039 (7.5)	0.040 (7.9)	0.030 (6.7)	Higher classification
Carcass score, females	EUROP	0.031 (6.9)	0.031 (2.8)	0.029 (6.4)	Higher classification
Fat score, males	Score	0.010 (2.9)	0.013 (2.8)	0.010 (3.0)	Higher fat score
Fat score, females	Score	0.009 (2.4)	0.0015 (2.4)	0.010 (2.5)	Higher fat score

## References

[BxD\\_final\\_report.pdf \(nordicebv.info\)](#)

[2019.10.14-TMI-of-beef-sires-used-for-dairy-crosses.pdf \(nordicebv.info\)](#)

## Expression and standardization

### Standardization

EBVs for all traits are standardized in the same way. The formula for adjusting the mean and standard deviation of EBV is:

$$EBV = (EBV_{\text{animal}} - \text{Mean}) \times \text{Standardization factor}$$

Breeding values for sub-indices are standardized to an average breeding value of 100 and a standard deviation of 10. NBDI is standardized to have a standard deviation of 10, and the mean is (by definition) close to zero.

### Mean of the relative breeding values

The genetic base is a relative breeding value, where 100 reflects the present genetic level. Hence, the genetic base is a rolling base, that is updated at each evaluation.

The genetic base is defined as the mean EBV of the sire of all calf's born 2-5 years before publication date. The genetic base includes BxD calves of all beef sire breeds, except BBL. This is because BBL is not used in all three Nordic countries.

### **Standard deviation of the relative breeding values**

The standard deviation of the relative EBVs is constant over time to ease interpretation.

Genetic standard deviation taken from the estimated genetic parameters are used to standardize EBV variation. The standard deviation would be 10 within breed if reliability of published bulls were 100 %. However, because reliability of proven bulls is below 100% this reduces standard deviation – most for traits with low heritability. On the other hand, addition of effect of breed of sire means that the observed standard deviation among bulls for most traits are considerably above 10, because there are considerable breed differences for most traits.