

Søren Ernst Madsen, Tirsvad Genetics: ‘Female Animals are Still the Strength of Individual Breeders.’

Working fruitfully together with AIs. This quality, besides his strong entrepreneurial spirit, rich ET experiences and pure passion for elite breeding, makes Tirsvad Genetics owner Ernst Madsen one of the most prominent breeders in Europe.

The naturally optimistic Dane is concerned precisely about the collaborative relationship between the breeder and AI. ‘I would never sign a contract in which I relinquish the breeding rights of female descendants. Never, ever!’

JORDEN STEGINK HAN HOPMAN & CHRISTINE MASSFELLER



A large billboard featuring all of your influential bull dams and sires. In Denmark, you don't do this so readily as a breeder. Nevertheless, thirty years of Tirsvad's elite breeding has led to unmistakable results all over Europe. VH Bosman, the sire of the current NTM topper Bahrain and the Italian Tirsvad Geyser-P. Two exemplary progeny proven bulls that serve as an illustration of the continuous stream of valuable Tirsvad genetics. When it comes to important

Tirsvad influences, then one name should certainly not be overlooked: Cogent Supershot. Madsen: ‘In Cogent's farewell announcement about Supershot, I found it really nice to read an explicit reference to his foundation dam Tirsvad Patron Claire EX-92.’ In order to make a direct link to the current situation: ‘Of all the Tirsvad cows with which I have worked, Claire is the best. For example, VH Fillman, with 35 NTM the nr.1 progeny proven bull in Scandinavia, originates from

Tirsvad 3Star Mojito-P, a Simon-P daughter of Pen-Col Superhero Mistral, is a favourite within the current Tirsvad breeding program.

her family. And we are still flushing her offspring. Even after ten generations, I can still recognize very specific Claire characteristics in them from time to time. One of the many proofs that cow families matter in breeding.’



Team Tirsvad: Søren Ernst Madsen and his wife Elisabeth Ravnevand.



Tirsvad Genetics in Denmark

- Owned by: Søren Ernst Madsen and Elisabeth Ravnevand
- Located in Braedstrup (Mid-Jutland)
- 50 DNA-tested heifers (Holstein and Wagyu) housed at the Tirsvad donor station for embryo production. Milking cows are housed on farms, especially at Skovgaard Holsteins and Lystbjerggaard Holsteins. Also 300 available recipients.
- Ration for ET heifers: grass silage, alfalfa, concentrate premix supplement, barley straw
- Current sires: Real Syn, VH Fawkes-P, Member-PP, VH Fuel, Can-PP, Mo-PP-Red, VH Sweet-P, VH Shuba-P, Ranking

POLLED

In the place where Claire and other popular bull dams were previously milked, nowadays they have only young donor heifers. Madsen manages his beautifully located, private nucleus program together with his wife and colleague ET/IVP specialist Elisabeth Ravnevand. Together they are laying the foundation for a successful breeding program. ‘Within current elite breeding, the shortest possible generation interval appears to be the most prominent motto. However, in the Tirsvad breeding program, we do not place the focus on starting as young as possible, but on the best possible embryo harvest. Breeding progress is not only achieved by a short generation interval, but also by the total selection possibilities. On average, our nucleus heifers produce eight embryos and provide five living offspring per flush. Exclusively via ET, for example, it has been possible to breed more

serious suffering. Via sires like Laval-P, Monty-P and Match-P, all three originating from Tirsvad branches of the Grietje family, polled breeding received a boost in Scandinavia. Also a significant development: this year during our travels, Elisabeth and I noticed that many elite breeders are making use of polled sires on their best cows. They have discovered that more and more polled sires can compete with the absolute top.’

DEPLETION

Madsen is noticing several other trends in Holstein breeding. Besides positive ones, such as the empowerment of polled, also a number that are cause for significant concern. ‘Both the dairy industry and Holstein breeding are at a crossroad. Dairy milk or soya milk, to eat meat or not; consumers are being given more options and a significant number of political decision makers gladly take a leading role on their behalf. Besides animal wellbeing, feed efficiency should also be taken into account with every breeding decision. A development in breeding that is of even greater concern to me is the continually greater influence that large breeding programs take for themselves. For example, AIs are mining more and more sires from their own nucleus program. As such, the role of passionate breeders is continually shrinking. While precisely they are the ones that have so much to offer. Besides real capital, farmers have original ideas and solutions. No longer including them in elite breeding causes a depletion with consequences that should not be underestimated.’ One trend in particular continues to bother Madsen. ‘The first step was that you were only allowed to offer bulls to the seller of the semen. I can live with that okay. But now there are contracts in which you are not even allowed to sell the daughters of daughters to third parties. Strength lies precisely in the female animals. As a breeder, they are the ones I like to work with. Stronger yet, female animals are the only remaining strength for individual breeders. As such, we will never sign contracts that do not allow for this.’

than 50 descendants from each our top donors Amber-PP-Red VG-86 and Pen-Col Superhero Mistral EX-91.’

We have now arrived at two of the most prominent players in the current Tirsvad breeding program. Amber, a Solitair daughter from the Dixie-Lee Aspen family, provided a large number of high sires (HI 07/23), including Ambo-P-Red (<Ranger) in Canada and Member-PP in Germany. ‘Making high and balanced PP sires available is today one of our most important goals,’ tells Madsen, who embraced polled breeding ten years ago. ‘As a young veterinarian, I found dehorning to be terrible work. Studies also show that calves undergo

‘Both the dairy industry and Holstein breeding are at a crossroad’

NATIONAL CHAMPION

Tirsvad Genetics is working successfully with Skovgaard Holsteins (540 milking cows). The genetic potential, for both production and conformation, of Tirsvad's female animals is especially proven by Tirsvad Nioniche EX-93 (Battlecry-Sargeant-Tirsvad Bookem Nessie). Besides annual productions of 16,000 kg/35,250 lb, the pitch black, balanced cow also stands out for conformation splendor. After the Reserve Grand title in 2022, this year in Herning she stepped up to the highest podium. In other words: Nioniche is the National Champion of Denmark!

VARIOUS SYSTEMS

Nevertheless, moments of sheer breeding delight still happen often. For example, with the descendants of the earlier mentioned Superhero daughter Mistral, descending from the American Gold-N-Oaks S Marbella family. ‘During our first American tour, Elisabeth became impressed by the tremendous breeding passion and deep cow families on farms like Larcrest, Sandy-Valley and Seagull-Bay. That is the reason why we wanted to invest in a high TPI family.’ Various European and North American AIs have popular Mistral sons and grandsons. A true favourite within the current Tirsvad breeding program is the picture cow and Mistral daughter Tirsvad 3Star Mojito-P (<Simon-P). ‘Besides the fact that she produces very well and functions in the 540-head milking herd at Skovgaard Holsteins, she has no less than four sons being used as sires of sons by owner Viking Genetics.’ A number of Mojito daughters are among Madsen's most prominent flush heifers right now. ‘I have always preferred breeding with cow families that score high within various index systems. Mojito and her daughters do that. What is also very important: Mojito's sons have very complete, balanced linear profiles. Sires – preferably PP – that breed average stature, productive and healthy daughters, who above all display smooth movements and sufficiently long teats to milk problem-free within various systems; these are the necessary sires on farms with 1000 or more cows.’ ●