

GenHotel: Results via Close Cooperation with Breeders and AIs

For 25 years, Koole and Liebrechts (K&L) has been a prominent source of sires. AIs from various European countries and North America recruit numerous young and talented sires via this Dutch breeding and marketing enterprise, sires that increasingly often carry the K&L name in their prefix. K&L is not only the source but is now more and more often involved in the breeding process. This is always in close cooperation with dozens of breeders, like via K&L's embryo program. Prominent sires from this new formula include the Spanish Nr.1, Pentagon K&L Pokemon Clun, and K&L Cidre, the highest Balisto-free bull in Germany.

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K&L, located in the town of Heino close to the city of Zwolle, was established in 1993 by Boudewijn Koole and Walter Liebrechts. Breeding enthusiasts who are active on the internet likely know about GenHotel. Since 2008 this has been K&L's internet platform with, for example, web pages of dozens of affiliated European breeders. As of this year, GenHotel is also the name of a separate corporation. K&L, the oldest corporation, focuses on the import and sale of semen from the programs of Evolution, the French Montbéliarde associations, VikingGenetics and various smaller AIs. The elite breeding branch, now operating independently under the GenHotel name, immediately received wind in its sails 25 years ago due to the rising international interest in daughters from Dutch sires like Celsius, Labelle and Jabot. In the meantime, a lot has changed in Holstein breeding, especially after the introduction of genomics. According to Boudewijn Koole, the essence has basically remained the same though. 'Everything in top breeding, also in genomic breeding, is ultimately financed by the sale of semen. It is important to remind yourself of this on a regular basis.'

EARLY AVAILABILITY OF SEMEN

The breeding team at GenHotel consists of 5 staff members. Claudia Liebrechts is responsible for the DNA tests, Ronny Prins manages the GenHotel site and Frank Wesseling coordinates exports. For this interview, in addition to speaking with CEO Koole, we also spoke with Martijn van der Boom. Together they are responsible for the breeding and marketing activities within

GenHotel BV. A prominent aspect of their work is the intensive contact with both sire analysts from various AIs and dozens of breeders. Cooperation is the cornerstone of the K&L/GenHotel philosophy. Van der Boom comments on the relationship with AIs: 'We see more in partnering than in competing. We believe in the strength of working together and have never had the intention of starting an AI ourselves. Neither are we planning to invest in reproduction possibi-

“High and complete sires have a lot of sales potential for the AIs”

lities such as our own ET teams or an OPU-IVF lab. As GenHotel, we are better off keeping busy with what we are good at: breeding and marketing interesting animals.' About the relationship with AIs, Koole adds: 'Thanks to our intensive contact with AIs, GenHotel often enjoys access to the very first doses of semen from young DNA-tested top bulls, extremely exclusive semen that is made available to us especially by European AIs based on verbal agreements, without signing contracts. As such, last year, for the breeders with which we have partnerships, we were able to make semen from Mission-P available very early on. The early availability of semen from new and high sires is an essen-

tial component of current top breeding. Good relationships with AIs is thus very important to GenHotel.'

KNOWLEDGE FACTOR

Besides the intensive AI contacts, GenHotel also works closely with a growing number of breeders. Koole: 'We have always owned animals together with breeders. These partnerships have expanded with the establishment of the K&L Embryo Program. This program offers breeders attractive conditions to become the co-owner of top genetics. It offers them the possibility of spreading financial risks over various animals, and thus to create more opportunities. With DNA breeding and dairy farms continually expanding, there is the danger that farmers discontinue elite breeding due to the amount of work or simply the large volume of information. In the past, farmers could choose from 10 sires of sons. Now there are sometimes up to 50, who additionally succeed each other at a rapid pace. Due to these developments, our role has grown. Unlike in the past, in 90% of cases, we help determine the mating in consultation with the breeder. Breeders also dare to trust us due to our proven success in the past.' Besides good relationships with AIs, speed and luck, knowledge is mentioned as the most important factor for success in breeding. Van der Boom: 'The "know-how" factor has only become more important. For example, it comes to making the right combinations, meaning I place more emphasis on the right profiles than on the right bloodlines. Besides genomics, the pedigree, cow family and the appearance of the animal itself are still very important to us. As a



Boudewijn Koole and Martijn van der Boom, the breeding experts at GenHotel: 'Since the introduction of genomics, the "know-how" factor in top breeding has only become more important.'

breeder, it is also handy to invest in cow families that actually perform. There are certain cow families that have more success than others. At the same time, we try to use cow families that have good results with flushing. Thanks to our connections, we have lots of information at our disposal that can benefit breeders. In addition, we know what the different markets require and are thus able to make better choices.'

OPPORTUNITIES

Making the right matings, that is the key according to Koole and Van der Boom. 'For each mating, top breeders need to ask themselves about the market they intend to breed for. The 2 main segments are TPI and RZG. In addition, breeders have the possibility of choosing to breed for various other indexes as well, such as NVI, PLI, ICO or ISU. Jedi scores gigantically high for TPI, but does not stand out for RZG. When you are flushing a high gRZG heifer, the use of a high gTPI bull without a high gRZG does not offer the greatest opportunity for success,' explains Koole, who indicates that the role and strength of GenHotel is that throughout Europe and also among the North American AIs, they are able to optimally sell sires based on their DNA results within

the different index systems. Van der Boom: 'Not all, but a number of AIs have further reduced the number of sires purchased in recent years. Partly due to new buyers in eastern Europe, the number of sires that go via GenHotel to AIs has remained steady. Breeding for AIs has become even more specialized. By making good choices, together with breeders, we have been able to achieve this success. In addition, the prices for unique sires, for example, an extreme top bull or a polled sire that is competitive in terms of level with the highest horned sires, have further increased. At the same time, AIs today are more likely to purchase complete bulls, for example bulls that score well for the calving traits, teat length, milking speed and rump angle, since the end user has demand for these bulls. High and complete sires have a lot of sales potential for the AIs. Because there are not a lot of bulls like that, they can also provide addition revenue to breeders.'

SHIFTING QUICKLY

Together with breeders, GenHotel currently owns about 40 active donors and has more than 500 pregnancies. The mentioned Spanish Nr.1 bull Pokemon Clun (Jetset) is bred

out of a Sargeant daughter from the VDP Leida family. Cinema son Cidre, the Nr.3 gRZG bull in Germany, descends from a G-Force out of the Southland Dellias. Other prominent names within the GenHotel breeding program are Koepon Classy 4672 GP-83 (AltaOak-MOM), Newhouse K&L Sneeker 6960 VG-86 (Shotglass-Stol Joc), De Biesheuvel Javina 50 VG-87 (Gofast-Bolton), Veenhuizer K&L Nelize (Balisto-MOM) and Willsbro K&L Supersire Aderyn VG-85: Every one of them, the foundation dam of popular AI sires. Koole and Van der Boom do not see a future in developing exclusively contractual, entirely protected breeding lines via their offspring: 'Once again, we see more in cooperating than competing with AIs. In addition, building a high and entirely exclusive breeding line takes a lot of time, while more than ever breeding requires the ability to shift gears quickly. Our task at GenHotel is to provide breeding material that is being asked for by AIs today.' ●