

10 Questions Michael Schrago



ABC

ABC Genetics is headquartered in Crans, Switzerland, and was founded in 1984 by Jean-Louis Schrago. Today, Schrago heads the business together with his son Michael. The concentration is on Red and polled genetics. ABC markets around 100,000 doses on a yearly basis in 22 countries worldwide. Among the most important markets are the USA, Canada, Mexico, Colombia, Ecuador, Switzerland, Germany, and France.

‘Red and Polled are the Topics of the Future!’

STEPHAN SCHNEIDER

When talking about pioneers of Red Holstein breeding, one cannot forget the name of Jean-Louis Schrago. The Swiss, whose breeding sense gifted his former employer ABS with the exceptional bull Triple Threat, founded his own business in 1984: ABC Genetics. And with success, as shown by top-sellers like Ja-Bob Jordan-Red, Gold-N-Oaks Italia-Red, and currently Pine-Tree Gold-PP-Red. And now, over 30 years since its establishment, ABC has a firm place on the international breeding scene. And it is now in its second generation. HI has 10 questions for Jean-Louis’s son and business partner, Michael.

Michael, ABC Genetics markets semen in over 20 countries worldwide. Where are your most important markets?

‘Our traditional markets were and are of course North America and Europe. Latin America is becoming ever more important. Dairy farming there is becoming more professional. That is why we are working to put together teams of veterinarians and technicians who will be able to directly market and breed with semen from our bulls. India and Africa are two other markets that we have recently advanced in.’

So away from traditional Holstein strongholds and into regions with extreme climatic conditions?

‘Yes and no. It is true that these are the regions where dairy farmers are becoming more professional, and as such, genetics plays an important role. In our breeding program we do not concentrate on Red Holsteins out of a love for the color. In extreme climates, animals with primarily red hair have clear advantages. Red hair reflects UV light more than white or black hair. The animals are more resistant to heat and are therefore able to graze longer.’

Red-Holstein offers the opportunity to access some different pedigrees, so does out-cross also play a roll?

‘Yes, of course! We see inbreeding as one of the biggest problems in Holstein breeding. At a comparable breeding quality, Red Holsteins offer much opportunity to explore alternative bloodlines. We are constantly looking for new families.’

What about polled genetics?

‘Polled and Red Holsteins unquestionable belong together and both are fast-growing markets. For the past 12 years we have focused on polled genetics. We sold our last horned bull 4 years ago.’

How many sires does ABC Genetics buy on a yearly basis?

‘On average, we buy 7-8 young sires. Most of them are born in the USA; a few in Switzerland. Semen collection is done at Interglobe Genetics in Illinois and Hawkeye Breeders Service in Iowa.’

But despite that, the headquarters of ABC is in Switzerland?

‘Yes, Switzerland is the home of my father and while I live in Colombia, I spend two months a year in the USA and Switzerland. The operating base for ABC Genetics is in the USA, which offers clear advantages in terms of genetics and marketing.’

Do you purchase your sires primarily based on American indexes?

‘Yes, we select on TPI basis and work closely together with well-known breeding operations like Ja-Bob and Pine-Tree. The advantage of TPI is that most dairy farmers worldwide are able to understand and interpret it.’

Despite this, you don’t see breeding as a pure numbers game?

‘No; many breeding companies buy bulls based only on their numbers without questioning the quality of the animal. For us, presentation



The success of Suard Jordan Irene-Red at the European Show in 2013 was also a milestone for ABC Genetics. Irene is at the home farm of ABC founder Jean-Louis Schrago in Switzerland, and her sire, Ja-Bob Jordan-Red, is now one of the most important sires for the company.

and classification results have and continue to play a large role. We are trying to combine high genomics with attractive, economic dams from good cow families.’

What about your trust in genomic breeding values?

‘About 60% of ABC’s marketed semen comes from genomic young sires and I think this number will rise. The problem with genomics is the over-estimation of several top bulls, but that is a purely technical problem. The more data we bring to genomic breeding valuations in the future, the more reliable the results will be.’

So ABC will still be active in 30 years...

‘Naturally, we are not staying away from the modern methods offered by breeding. We see an exciting future for Red Holsteins and polled genetics and we are offering genetic alternatives. We have a long history, but also a big future ahead of us.’ ●