

Dr. Kent A. Weigel

Dr. Kent A. Weigel, Madison, Wis., has been named the recipient of the Award for Meritorious Service presented by the American Jersey Cattle Association (AJCA) and National All-Jersey Inc. (NAJ).

This award is given annually to a living individual(s) who, in the joint opinion of the Boards of Directors of the national Jersey organizations, *has made a notable contribution to the advancement of the Jersey breed and the livelihood of Jersey owners in the United States through research, education, development, marketing, or other significant activities of the allied dairy industry.*

“A remarkable scientist whose leadership is accelerating Jersey progress” for the 21st century were the words used by the president of the Wisconsin Jersey Breeders Association, Brian Barlass of Janesville, to introduce Dr. Kent Weigel in a letter recommending him for the Meritorious Service Award.

Weigel’s contributions to breed advancement emanate as chief architect of research that is the basis of tools Jersey producers use daily to breed more profitable cattle. He is that rare individual who can not only carry out the science, but also apply it to common-sense uses and communicate its benefits at the grass-roots level.

Weigel is professor and chair of the Department of Dairy Science at the University of Wisconsin (UW)-Madison, a position he has held since 2010. He also serves as extension dairy genetics specialist for the state of Wisconsin.

“Dr. Weigel is the perfect conduit for boiling down applicable science to practical on-farm, understandable tools,” wrote Jeff Ziegler, genomic program manager at Select Sires Inc., in a letter of endorsement. His ability to create research procedures that address emerging issues sets him apart in the specialized field of dairy genetics. He infuses fresh insight into complex genetic issues with each research project he takes on.

Over the past 17 years, Weigel has been awarded 11 research grants from the AJCC Research Foundation—more than any other recipient. His first foundation-funded study, to control inbreeding in commercial Jersey herds using individual mating programs, serves as the framework for JerseyMate.



His ground-breaking research on the relationship between linear traits and culling risk has guided the AJCA in refinement of multiple projects, including the type appraisal program and the formula for Jersey Performance Index (JPI). The 2015 version of JPI, directed by Weigel, was the most comprehensive update ever undertaken, developed from an extensive evaluation of production, longevity and health data.

“Weigel prepared himself exceptionally well for his leadership roles in the U.S. dairy genetics business, where he has held increasingly important positions of responsibility over the past 20 years,” continued Ziegler.

He earned undergraduate degrees in animal science and biology from the UW-Platteville in 1987 and a master’s degree in animal science from Iowa State University two years later. He simultaneously received his master’s degree in biometry and a Ph.D. in dairy science from UW-Madison in 1992. He began his career as senior research associate for Holstein Association USA and then became genetic director for World-Wide Sires Inc. He joined the UW-Madison team as a research scientist in 1995.

Among the most prolific authors of peer-reviewed scientific publications in the dairy genetics field, Weigel has published

more than 100 journal articles and given lectures to academic, industry and producer audiences in more than 25 countries around the world.

Weigel’s first dealings with Jersey folks came in November 1998, when he spoke to a group attending an international Jersey appraiser workshop. Four months later, in March 1999, the AJCA Board of Directors appropriated \$5,000 towards his research to control inbreeding using a computerized mating program. Two years later, Weigel was the featured speaker at the AJCA annual meeting in Green Bay, Wis., where he spoke about balancing inbreeding concerns with genetic improvements for production and type.

On the heels of this study were several others funded with Jersey dollars, including a follow-up study to optimize inbreeding control through computer mating programs (2001) and a pair of studies to investigate longevity of Jersey cattle using survival data and risk

of culling statistics (2000 and 2002). Weigel conducted four separate studies from 2003-2007 to evaluate the performance of Jersey-sired calves out of Holstein dams for economically important traits, cheese yield potential and feed efficiency.

Weigel’s most recent foundation-funded project served as a foundation for the 2015 updates for JPI. The revision focused on prediction of lifetime net profit from production, type, health, longevity and fertility traits that are available early in life, with emphasis on using the most recent cow population possible.

“His approach allowed the inclusion of cows still alive at the time of data analysis, which led to a more contemporary assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the current U.S. Jersey cow population,” commented Dr. H. Duane Norman, Fulton, Md., a member of the AJCA Research Advisory Committee and fellow recipient of the Award for Meritorious Service and the AJCA Distinguished Service Award.

Another Jersey-specific tool developed at the UW-Madison while Weigel was at the helm is Jersey KetoMonitor, to help producers better manage ketosis in their Jersey herds. The project was a collaborative effort funded by the AJCC Research Foundation and Cooperative Resources International

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and carried out by the UW-Madison. The second part of the project—identification of genetic markers associated with the ketosis phenotype—has been conducted, with findings to be published soon.

“Weigel’s ability as a teacher has often been recognized as he communicates effectively with undergraduate and graduate students, professional peers and the entire dairy industry,” noted Ziegler.

His ability to connect with others, coupled with a desire to work with the national Jersey organizations, has cultivated a trusted relationship between the two. Jersey leaders frequently call on him to provide perspective on scientific matters and ask him to make presentations to members. Weigel was a featured speaker at a seminar to kick off the AJCA-NAJ Annual Meetings in East Peoria, Ill, in 2015, where he spoke about the ever-advancing technology of genotyping, and has been on the agenda for Jersey Youth Academy twice (?).

Weigel has served the dairy industry on several key national committees as well. He sits on the dairy sire evaluation and sire fertility committees of the National Association of Animal Breeders and is a consultant for the Council on Dairy Cattle Breeding. He is also a member of the research team for the National Program for Improvement of Feed Efficiency in Dairy Cattle funded by USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture and the scientific advisory committee for Neogen Corporation. He sat on the editorial board of the *Journal of Dairy Science* for five years and was a member of the animal genome panel for USDA’s National Research Initiative in 2004.

The American Dairy Science Association presented Weigel with the Young Scientist Award and the Foundation Scholar Award in 2003 and the Lush Award for Animal Breeding and Genetics in 2010. The College of Agricultural and Life Sciences at UW-Madison gave him the Pound Research Award in 2005 and the Pound Extension Award in 2008. He also earned the J.S. Donald Farm and Industry Short Course Teaching Award from UW-Madison in 2009.

Although we hope our Jersey organizations will benefit from many more years of his expertise in dairy genetics, we believe his contributions to date make it an appropriate time to honor Dr. Kent Weigel with this year’s AJCA-NAJ Award for Meritorious Service, summed Barlass.

AJCA-NAJ Award for Meritorious Service

1999 Morris B. Ewing, Tucson, Ariz.*

- 2000 Allen D. Meyer, West Fargo, N.D.*
- 2001 Calvin Covington, Ocala, Fla.
- 2002 John Jeter, Hillmar, Calif.
- 2003 Charlene Nardone, Orient, Ohio*
- 2003 Merlin D. Woodruff, Urbana, Ohio*
- 2004 Michael L. Brown, Seattle, Wash.
- 2005 Rodger S. Hoyt, Delaware, Ohio*
- 2006 Dr. Clarence S. Olson, Madison, Wis.
- 2007 Dr. John C. Wilk, Raleigh, N.C.
- 2008 Henry H. Dowlen, Lewisburg, Tenn.
- 2009 Dr. Ronald E. Pearson, Blacksburg, Va.
- 2010 Dr. Joseph A. Lineweaver, Radford, Va.
- 2011 David Brandau, Wilton, Wis.
- 2011 David Parkinson, Sahuarita, Ariz.
- 2012 Dr. H. Duane Norman, Fulton, Md.
- 2012 Dr. Curtis P. Van Tassell, Beltsville, Md.
- 2013 Dr. Robert Cropp and Dr. Edward Jesse, Madison, Wis.
- 2014 Richard “Dick” Smith, Waunakee, Wis.
- 2015 Paula M. England, Columbus, Ohio
- 2016 Richard “Dick” Clauss, Hillmar, Calif.
- 2017 Dr. Kent A. Weigel, Madison, Wis.

* deceased