

Spring Calving Index – £SCI

An economic breeding index for spring block-calving systems



What is the £SCI?

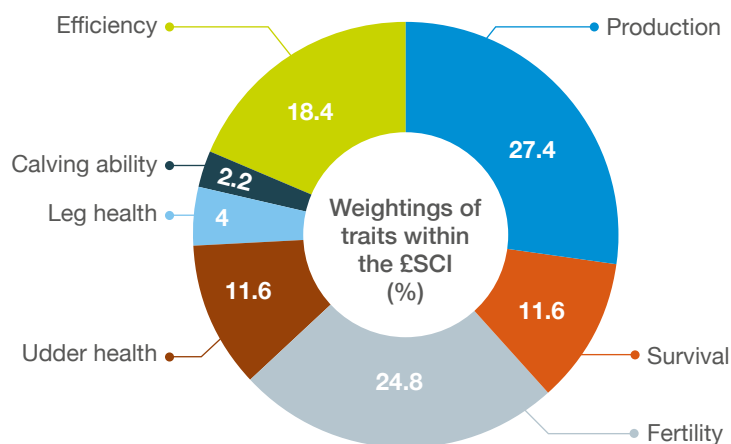
The Spring Calving Index (£SCI) is an across-breed genetic ranking index developed in consultation with industry partners specifically for spring block-calving herds and expressed as a financial value.

The £SCI:

- Promotes milk quality rather than volume
- Places strong emphasis on fertility
- Selects for reduced maintenance cost
- Improves udder and leg health
- Places strong emphasis on longevity
- Promotes easier calving
- Protects functional type – Feet & Legs and Udders

£SCI explained

- The £SCI value represents the additional profit a high £SCI bull is expected to return from each of its milking daughters over her lifetime compared with an average bull of £0 SCI. These are specifically calculated for UK markets and farming conditions
- The £SCI will ensure important genetic areas are maintained or improved, eg fertility (calving interval and non-return rate), Somatic Cell Count (SCC) and milk solids
- Increased emphasis on the maintenance cost by reducing cow liveweight will give the daughters of high £SCI bulls improved efficiency suited to a spring calving, grazing-based system



When to use the £SCI?

- The £SCI has been created specifically for spring block-calving systems, which place a heavy reliance on grazed grass. For autumn block-calving herds, we recommend using the Autumn Calving Index (£ACI)
- The £SCI is an across-breed ranking. Bulls of all breeds will be shown on the same base so their £SCI values are directly comparable
- Use the £SCI to select the best bulls to breed profitable cows for a spring block-calving system
- £SCI should be used as the initial screening tool in bull selection; then look within this group for the traits that most need improving in your herd

£SCI – Frequently asked questions

1. What need is there for a specific spring-calving index (£SCI)?

The £SCI has been introduced at the request of farmers to provide them with a genetic index to help breed a cow that suits a spring block-calving system, making intensive use of grazed grass. The index has been developed to breed a cow that produces lower volumes of milk of a higher quality and places a particular emphasis on fertility and calving ease to achieve a tight calving block.

The index also favours bulls that will produce a smaller cow with lower maintenance requirements. As with the £PLI and £ACI, lower SCC and sound legs, feet and udders are all important.

2. Functional type is important in these systems. Why isn't there more emphasis on this in £SCI?

Functional type forms part of £SCI, just as it does with £PLI and £ACI. Mammary health and conformation, together with legs and feet, are included, but it is important to note that these traits are also strongly correlated with some of the other components of the index, including lifespan, so they are more important than would seem at first glance.

3. Why has £SCI been developed as an across-breed index?

£SCI is being presented by AHDB Dairy as an across-breed index because this is considered to be the most useful format for spring block-calving herds. Many of these herds use more than one breed, either as pure or cross-bred animals, so it's important for them to be able to compare the genetic potential of bulls from different breeds against one another.

4. Can the £PLI, £ACI and £SCI be compared?

No. The indexes have been designed for different farming situations, with the £SCI set on its own unique breeding base.

5. Why should the £SCI be used instead of other country indexes?

Different milk payment systems in different countries is one of several reasons why you should use the UK breeding values when making breeding decisions for a UK dairy herd. It is important to note that the £SCI considers the economic influences to UK dairy farmers so although it may be very similar to other country indexes, it is the most appropriate index for UK spring block-calving dairy farmers to use when making their breeding decisions.

6. Why are there minus Predicted Transmitting Ability (PTA) milk bulls near the top of the £SCI list?

Bulls near the top of the £SCI will transmit a range of attributes that make them suitable for spring block-calving herds. Their particular strengths will inevitably be in different areas and producers are advised to choose those that will transmit the characteristics most needed for their own situation.

7. Can I use £SCI if I block calve at a different time of year?

£SCI has been formulated specifically for herds that block calve in spring and place a heavy reliance on summer grazing. It is only suitable for use in these circumstances and not recommended for autumn block-calving herds, which have a higher requirement for winter concentrate feeding. Autumn block-calving herds should use the £ACI for their breeding decisions.

UK genetic evaluations are undertaken and published by AHDB Dairy three times a year: April, August and December.

Further information

For more information on AHDB Dairy breeding and genetics, visit dairy.ahdb.org.uk/breeding or email breeding.evaluations@ahdb.org.uk

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