



Consortium to offer semen by gender

WELLINGTON: A consortium of companies is preparing to offer New Zealand farmers gender-sorted semen and embryos.

The semen-sexing technology will enable farmers to seek female semen from top bulls quickly to boost the genetics of their dairy herds, AgResearch's manager of reproductive technologies, Dr Vish Vishwanath, said.

In conventional breeding, half the dairy cows produce bull calves, of which most are sold cheaply as bobby calves.

The new process will deliver about 90% female calves.

Texas-based company Sexing Technologies has set up in a laboratory at AgResearch Ruakura for the 2009 breeding season.

Waikato Innovation Park chief executive Derek Fairweather, who is helping the operation become established, said until now cost had been a barrier to farmers gaining access to sex-sorted semen.

"It's been a challenge creating a low enough cost model to meet the price points of our farmers," Mr Fairweather said. "It's now up

to artificial breeding companies to be imaginative in how they offer this new product."

Sexing Technologies USA chief executive Juan Moreno said improvements in the technology had resulted in increased conception rates and lower product prices.

"If farmers prove receptive to the technology, as they have in other countries, the company will look at setting up a permanent laboratory," he said.

The general manager of genetics at livestock genetics company LIC, Peter Gatley, said sexed semen had been near the top of the "wish list" of dairy farmers. But the product needed to be sorted in New Zealand if they were to access the best bulls for local conditions.

That had not been possible until now.

Livestock genetics company ABS's managing director John Hepburn said the technology also had potential in other species, such as horses, sheep, pigs and deer. — NZPA