

Statistical Indicators

E-18

Somatic Cell Score with Test Day Model

▪ **Introduction**

Mastitis is one of the most important herd related illnesses in Dutch cattle management. Mastitis results in high economic losses due to a decrease in production (including non-delivered milk), treatment costs, labour costs, early culling and contamination of other cows. Furthermore, increasingly strict demands are made on the somatic cell count with respect to the payment for the milk.

Dairy farmers who participate in the milk recording system may also opt to have the somatic cell count in the milk of an individual cow analysed. The somatic cell count in milk is expressed as the number of cells per ml. When presented, the somatic cell count measured is divided by 1000, so that a somatic cell count of 50 means that there are 50,000 cells in one ml of milk. The dairy farmer is interested in the somatic cell count because the somatic cell count is used by the dairy industry as a quality criterion for milk delivered. A high somatic cell count means lower quality milk. This is expressed in a discount of the milk price paid when the somatic cell count of the milk delivered is over 400,000 cells per ml.

At the same time, the somatic cell count says something about udder health. There is a correlation between somatic cell count and infection or mastitis in the udder. If a cow has a high somatic cell count on the day of milk recording, this may mean that, at that moment, the cow's immune system is fighting an infection in one or more parts of the body by producing extra white blood cells. Therefore, a high somatic cell count may point to mastitis. There may, however, be another (unknown) cause for it. If, besides a high somatic cell count, externally perceptible symptoms to the udder, milk or cow, are observed, it suggests clinical mastitis. Subclinical mastitis is only perceptible from changes in the somatic cell count and the presence of pathogens in the milk. In this chapter, the Somatic Cell Score index will be described in detail.

▪ **Data in Somatic Cell Score evaluation**

Starting in May 2003, the breeding values for somatic cell score are calculated using the Test Day Model based on testday somatic cell counts. Data edits and data suppliers are similar to the Testday Model for milk production (chapter E-7 of the CRV handbook). The only difference is the data-edit on milk yield. In the somatic cell score evaluation testdays with known somatic cell counts are used, regardless of the availability of milk yield.

▪ **Statistical Model**

As the somatic cell count (SCC) measurements from individual test milk data are not normally distributed, this data cannot be used directly for the breeding value estimation. The SCC measurements are transformed in order to comply with the condition of normal distribution into somatic cell scores (SCS) for the breeding value estimation. The

transformation is as follows:

$$SCS = 1000 + 100 \cdot (2 \log(SCC/1000)),$$

In which SCC represents the somatic cell count from test milk data, expressed in the number of cells per ml. The SCS is used in the breeding value estimation. The SCS can be calculated back to the SCC via:

$$SCC = 1000 \times 2^{(SCS-1000)/100}$$

The relation between SCS and SCC is demonstrated in Figure 1.

The breeding value estimation for SCS is calculated with the Test Day Model as described in chapter E-7 of the Manual Quality. For SCS, the same fixed effects and random regression effects are used as for milk production traits. They are corrected for heterogeneity of variance in the same way that milk production traits are. With the Test Day Model, the breeding values of every animal are estimated for daily production for each day from day 5 through 305 in lactation 1 to 5 for milk production traits. In the same way, the Test Day Model provides breeding values for SCS for every day from day 5 through 305 in lactation 1 to 5. In that way, every animal obtains its own genetic curve in lactation 1 to 5.

The genetic standard deviations for SCS on a daily basis are expressed in Figure 2, including the standard deviations of permanent environment, the herd curves, and the rest.

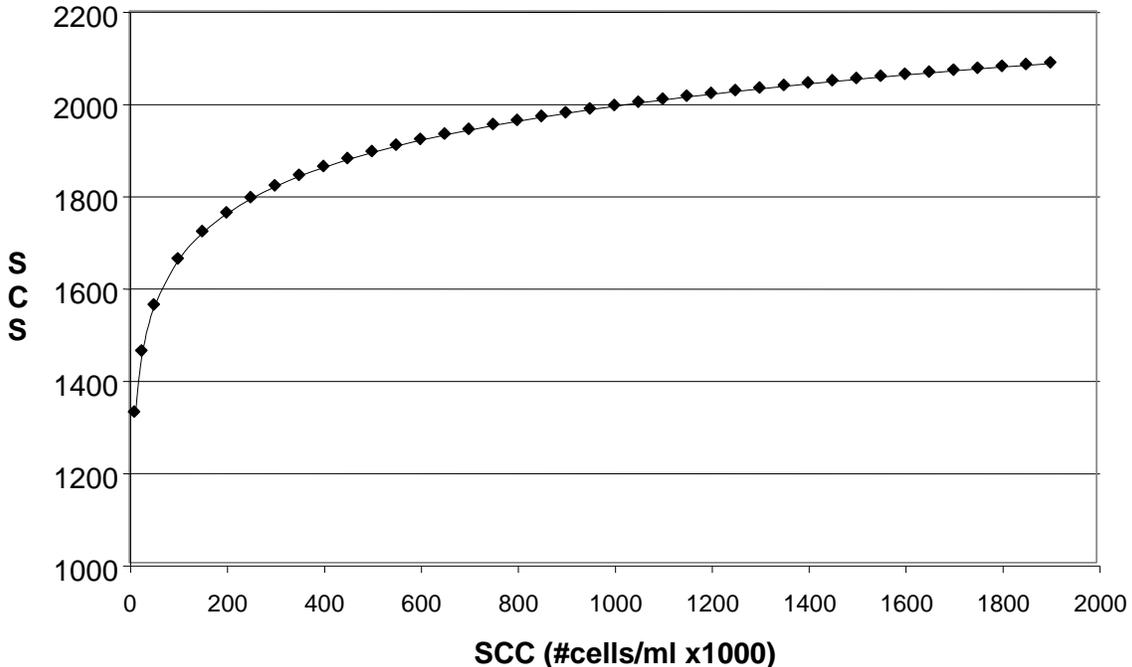


Figure 1. Somatic cell score (SCS) as a function of somatic cell count (SCC)

Table 1. Genetic standard deviation, heritabilities (diagonal) and genetic correlations of somatic cell count.

| SCS | Genetic St.dev. | Parity 1 | Parity 2 | Parity 3 | Parity 4 | Parity 5 | Totaal |
|---------------|-----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Parity 1 | 14.36 | 0.21 | | | | | |
| Parity 2 | 16.95 | 0.75 | 0.27 | | | | |
| Parity 3 | 18.63 | 0.70 | 0.88 | 0.28 | | | |
| Parity 4 | 18.99 | 0.69 | 0.86 | 0.98 | 0.28 | | |
| Parity 5 | 19.11 | 0.68 | 0.85 | 0.97 | 0.99 | 0.28 | |
| Totaal | 15.62 | 0.86 | 0.94 | 0.96 | 0.95 | 0.94 | 0.37 |

The heritabilities for SCS on a daily basis are expressed in Figure 3 and are 0.21 for lactation 1, 0.27 for lactation 2 and 0.28 for lactation 3, 4 and 5. The heritabilities and genetic correlation on lactation level are shown in table 1.

The breeding values for SCS on a daily basis are not published. However, from these day-breeding values, the 305 day breeding values are calculated by adding the day-breeding values from day 5 up to and including day 305. Afterwards the breeding values for lactations 1 to 5 are combined in the same way into a comprehensive breeding value for SCS in 305 days as is done with milk production traits, specifically:

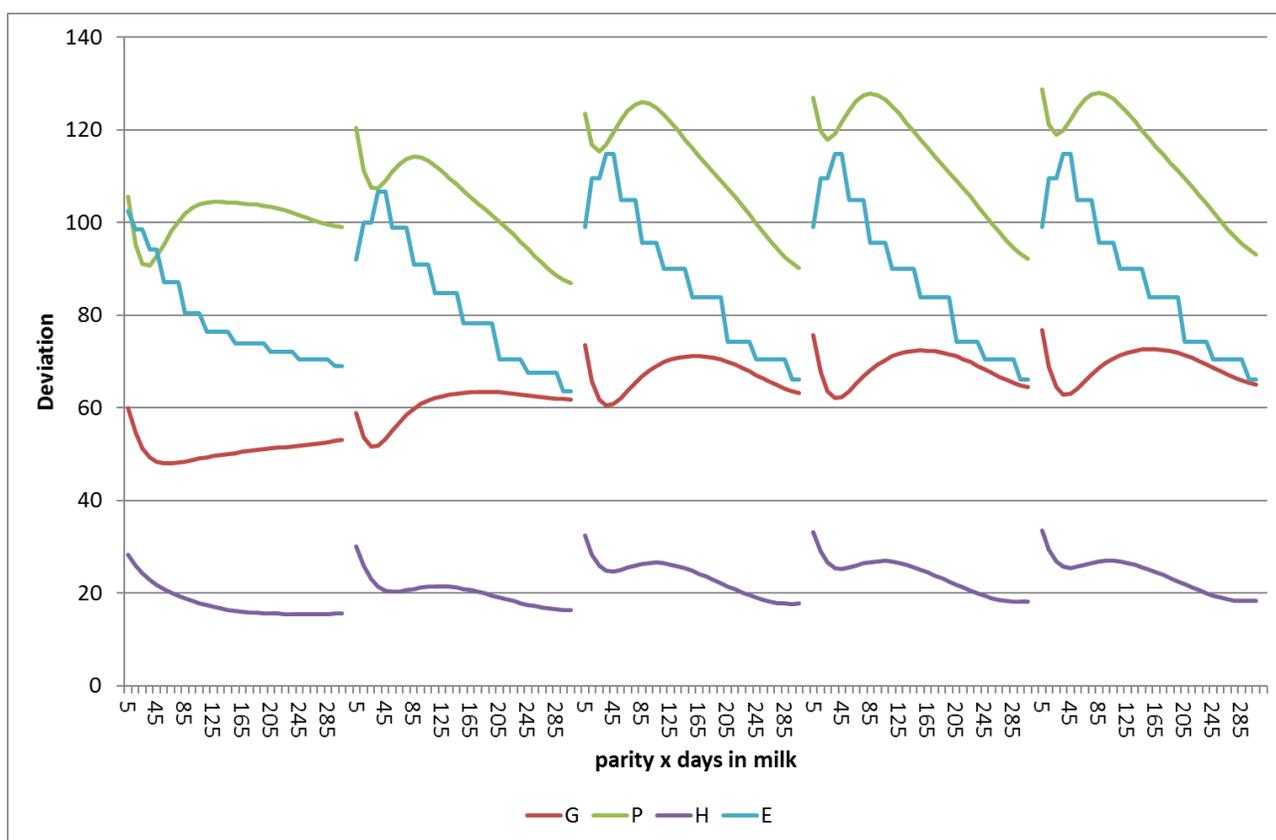


Figure 2. Genetic (G), permanent environment (P), herd curve (H) and the rest (R) standard deviations for SCS on a daily basis

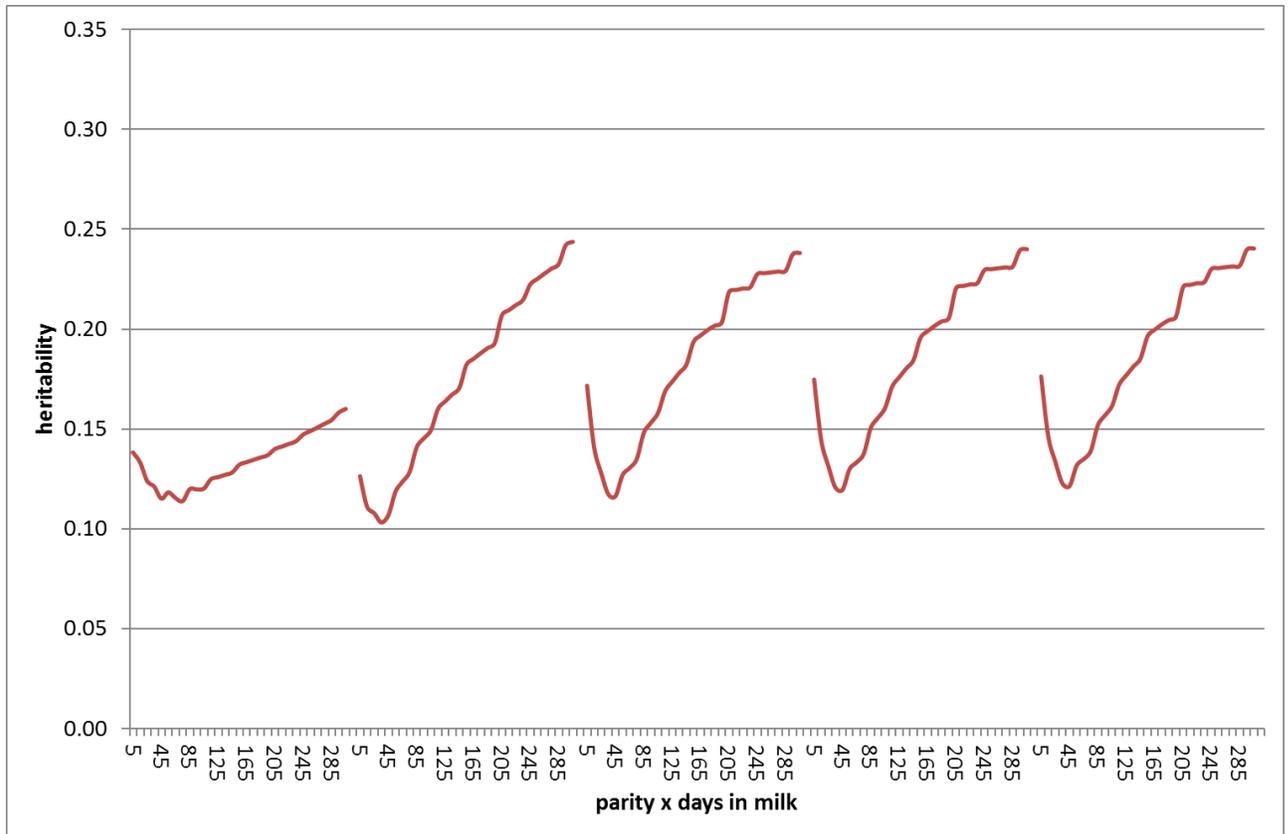


Figure 3. Heritabilities for SCS on a daily basis

$$BV_{\text{overall}} = 0,32 \times BV_1 + 0,25 \times BV_2 + 0,20 \times BV_3 + 0,14 \times BV_4 + 0,09 \times BV_5$$

Other derived traits, like persistency and late maturity as they relate to milk production traits, are not (yet) calculated for somatic cell score.

▪ Publication

The breeding value for somatic cell score is a relative breeding value that is presented with an average of 100 and a standard deviation of 4. A breeding value above 100 means that the daughters of the bull have a below average somatic cell count. Each point increase in breeding value coincides with 3.59, 4.24, 4.66, 4.75 and 4.78 lower 305-days SCS in lactation 1 to 5, for a lactation average of 3.90 lower SCS per point overall breeding value.

An example: the average somatic cell count of the cows in the base population Z (see next paragraph for definition) on day 5 of lactation 1 is 165421 cells per ml. These cows have an average breeding value of exactly 100, since they compose the base population. The $SCC = 165,421$ cells/ml gives $SCS = 1000 + 100 \times (2 \log(165,421/1000)) = 1,737.22$. When these cows are mated with a bull that has a breeding value of 110, the offspring will have an average breeding value of 105. If all other circumstances remain the same, the average SCS of the offspring is equal to $1,737.22 - 5 \times 9.76 = 1,688.42$. This corresponds with $SCC = 118,127$, or 47,294 cells/ml less. When a different breeding value from a bull, for example 90 or

110 is the starting point, or a different SCC is assumed, one will also end up with a different number of cells per ml.

For publication rules, see chapter 'Publication rules sires'.

- **Base**

See chapter 'Bases for breeding values and base differences'.