

# NEWS

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## **BeefTalk: Buying Bulls by the Numbers Can Provide Data and Increase Profit**

**By Kris Ringwall, Extension Beef Specialist,  
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Seasons sure fly by. The calves aren't on the ground yet, but the livestock rings are gearing up for the bull sale season. In Dickinson, we have what we call "Bull Days" during which we invite local and regional bull producers in to preview this years offering of yearling or two-year-old bulls. More than 500 producers spent all or part of the day discussing the beef business and shopping for bulls.

The Bull Day Showcase really gave producers an opportunity to see the quality of bulls available for sale. My hat is off to the artificial insemination industry for aggressively developing and promoting the technology of providing affordable genetics to the beef industry, which helps artificial insemination companies realize a profit and gives producers the opportunity to do the same.

In an earlier column, I shared information about the spread in the value of calves produced at the North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension Center. For the past four years, we have collected data on retained ownership. Let me repeat those numbers. Bull number 1400 returned a net profit of \$146.41 more than our poorest Angus bull. Is a spread in net profit of \$146.41 significant? You bet. And it certainly gives us incentive to know what we are buying when we look for a bull.

Producers should not simply buy any bull. When the research extension center purchases bulls, the data is reviewed on all bulls available, and only those bulls that have documented genetics are considered. Today, that's most of the bulls offered. Breeders very willingly provide Estimate Progeny Differences (EPDs), the product of breed association sire evaluations, to guide prospective clients in getting the bulls they need.

At the Bull Day Showcase, there was no shortage of well developed bulls with good production numbers. Despite the availability of data on bulls, many producers simply don't know how to make the numbers work for them. Perhaps the process is so simple that some don't want to believe in them.

Buying a bull involves an appraisal. The bull needs to be sound, well developed and fertile, with an appropriate attitude. You may buy a bull based on his looks, but you sell calves based on his genetics. At the center, the commercial cows are randomly mated to high accuracy, proven AI bulls with selected EPD values. Minimum thresholds are selected for all traits (particularly milk) with emphasis placed on birth weight, weaning weight, carcass weight and marbling.

The emphasis has varied as new data is collected each year, but the

commercial herd is still randomly mated to bulls that keep the herd balanced in all traits but reflective of productive cows that put dollars on the rail. EPDs, although not perfect, provide producers with an insight into the production potential. Birth weight and weaning weight are two good examples of how EPDs can work.

At the center, we have four bulls that have each produced more than 20 steer calves. These birth weight numbers tell the center two things: first, those bulls with the lower EPD numbers produced lighter calves and second, for our herd, we now have a feel for what a particular EPD means in the center's herd when using high accuracy bulls.

For weaning weight, we were able to see trends develop.

The use of EPDs allows us to set the center's benchmarks for birth weight and weaning weight and go about selecting bulls to make the changes needed. Use those EPDs. They will be productive for you and for the beef industry.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at [www.BeefTalk.com](http://www.BeefTalk.com) For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to [www.CHAPS2000.COM](http://www.CHAPS2000.COM) on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0017.

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## EPDs and Performance for Four Bulls

NDSU Dickinson Research Extension Center

Bull ID	Number of Steers Tested	Birthweight		Weaning Weight	
		EPD	Average	EPD	205 day adjusted ave.
127	35	+2.1	95	+31	581
1445	24	-0.7	87	+30	583
155	34	+0.5	86	+24	561
142	22	-1.7	80	+29	565

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