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BeefTalk: Use Data and Benchmark Values to Buy Bulls as an Investment

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Bull buying is a lot like buying stocks. Do investors buy stocks without looking at earnings and a prospectus and without considering future earning potential?

The future of a producer's herd can hinge on sire selection because bull buying is an investment in the future. Who would take their life savings and invest it in a plan that has no history or supporting data? So why don't producers do the same for bull investments?

Although time consuming, finding the right bull for a cow herd is much like the stories we tell: our memories are very selective and rearrange thoughts so that good stories embellish themselves and get better with age. Within a

beef cow herd, bulls tend to become landmarks in much the same way -- actual data may or may not support the pedestal built for them. Evaluation of the genetic trend lines within breed associations indicate new bulls just keep getting better.

The process is relatively simple. The key is to learn how to understand and navigate through the data presented. At the NDSU Dickinson Research Extension Center, benchmarks within our herd are the foundation on which we base our evaluations to make industry numbers relevant to our needs. In the case of bull selection, those industry numbers are Expected Progeny Difference (EPD) values.

We pick selected bulls, use them on 30 to 50 cows and check the data that comes back. We call these benchmark bulls. Obviously, these are high-accuracy, well-proven artificial insemination bulls. These bulls are used over several breeding seasons to more accurately gauge their value, and we hope, let us better assess seasonal differences that may bias our performance and management evaluations.

Alternatives are available for producers who do not AI cows to incorporate one or two benchmark bulls within their herd. Not all cows need to be bred AI, but a synchronized breeding program with a random set of cows may be a possibility.

Within the research extension center herd, we have three Angus benchmark sires we evaluate for many traits. To illustrate the value of benchmarks, allow me to focus on birth, weaning, yearling weight and yearling height. They are:

- Landmark Bando 912, born in 1989. He has current Expected

Progeny Difference values of +2.1 for birth weight, +31 for weaning weight, +61 for yearling weight and +.2 for yearling height.

- Papa 8810 R R Hero 0915, born in 1990. His values are -1.1 for birth weight, +26 for weaning weight, +41 for yearling weight and -.2 for yearling height.
- Summitcrest Traveler X044, born in 1988. His values are +.5 for birth weight, +24 for weaning weight, +53 for yearling weight and +.2 for yearling height.

None of these bulls were barn burners for growth, but a fundamental point when selecting benchmark bulls is accuracy and acceptable performance at an affordable price. Producers do not need trait leader bulls to establish where they are. In retrospect, the average net return in the feedlot for steer calves of the three bulls combined was $27.41 for 1997, 1998, and 1999.

These bulls have given us solid multi-year benchmarks to guide the purchase of new bulls. Bulls with birth weight EPDs of -1.1 to +2.1 produced calves that averaged 89 pounds at birth. When weaning weight EPDs were +24 to to +31, the calves had averaged 571 pounds at 205 days of age (weaning). For yearling weight, EPDs of +41 to +61, produced live weights at harvest of 1151 at 420 days of age. The last trait was yearling height. The EPD's ranged from -.2 to +.2 and the calves at weaning had an average frame score of 4.96.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at 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 on the Internet. In correspondence about this

column, refer to BT0024.

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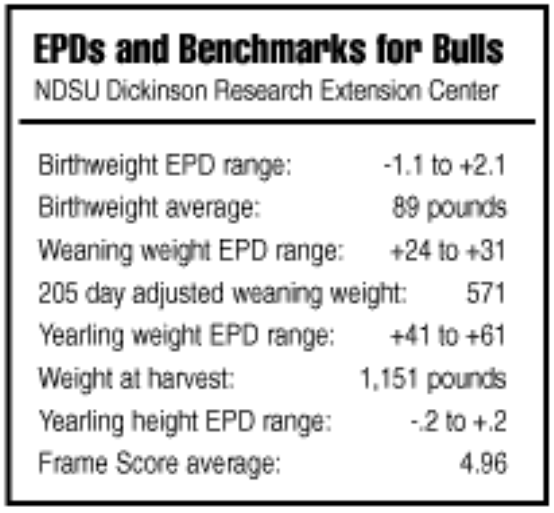

EPDs and Benchmarks for Bulls
NDSU Dickinson Research Extension Center

Birthweight EPD range:	-1.1 to +2.1
Birthweight average:	89 pounds
Weaning weight EPD range:	+24 to +31
205 day adjusted weaning weight:	571
Yearling weight EPD range:	+41 to +61
Weight at harvest:	1,151 pounds
Yearling height EPD range:	-.2 to +.2
Frame Score average:	4.96

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