Records Provide the Proof When Looking for Bull Power

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Bull buying season is approaching. Of the many areas in the cattle business that follow tradition, bull buying would be up toward the top of the list. From the beginning of the domestication of cattle, selection was important. (Perhaps the most important trait in early cattle production was simply survival of the fittest.)

In the distant past, work needed to get done and a good source of genuine muscle was desired. Less-muscled specimens could easily be a protein source and cows were utilized for milk production. Selection was practiced and certain bulls were allowed to mate with the females, a practice that continues some 10,000 years later.

A fellow in England eventually put into writing the concept of "like begets like," and launched the documented art and science of animal breeding. In other words, if I mate big bulls to big cows, I will get big cattle. If I mate small bulls to small cows, I will get small cattle. What was even more exciting, you could mate big bulls to small cows and get medium-sized cattle. The "Bakewell" concept of cattle breeding or livestock improvement has been around for more than a century and is still prevalent in the beef business today.

There are still many bulls purchased today on the concept that "like begets like." The concept is true and works. However, today, we actually know why "like begets like." This additional understanding began with Mendel and his peas. He noticed some where wrinkled and some weren't. What was even more important, Mendel selected only seven traits, and worked with each trait separately. He found that, yes, "like begets like," but not always.

For years, peas were round and smooth in Burke County, and peas were round and wrinkled in Divide County. This went on for years, and the champion pea of the Burke County Fair was always smooth and round. The champion pea at the Divide County Fair was always round and wrinkled. "Like begets like" and this was fine. Everyone was happy. Then one day, an ambitious sort from Burke County, was driving down Highway Five a little too fast, and as the road curved, Burke County peas spilled in Divide County.

The peas, knowing no better, germinated, flowered and gave to the bees a full load of smooth and round pea pollen, (the male) and the Divide County peas welcomed the bees loaded with fresh new Burke County pollen. The incident was soon forgotten. That year at the Divide County Fair, all the peas were still round and wrinkled and the champion pea was the roundest and most wrinkled pea anyone ever saw.

The seed was saved and with great pride, the seed was planted and, well, Iím sure most of you know by now, these beautiful round and wrinkled seeds produced not only round and wrinkled seeds, but round and smooth seeds as well.

Astonished, a new set of rules had to be drawn up for the fair (at a rather lengthy meeting), but more importantly residents found that, "like did not beget like." Thus the principles of genetic dominance were discovered, and forever more, what you see is not necessarily what you get.
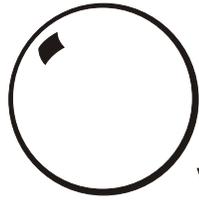
Even more interesting, the round and smooth seeds that came from round and wrinkled parents, were rounder and smoother and larger than the round and smooth seeds from round and smooth parents.

Adapted to todayís bull buying principles, yes, there is comfort in matching the general appearance of your cattle with the general appearance of the bull. However, the only way to know if he is round and wrinkled and can sire round and smooth is to have records.
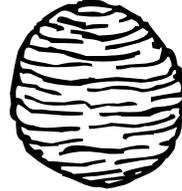
In closing, not everything in this BeefTalk is factual, but it isnít in the bull business either. Good luck buying bulls and may you find all your ear tags.

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

Round and Smooth Peas

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Round and Wrinkled Peas