Sire Selection Made Easy: Pick From the Top 25 Percent

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Bull sales are active with many bulls changing hands. The bull sale season peaks mid to late winter and will soon slow up, followed by more direct farm and ranch sales.

Picking bulls is critical to the long-term survival of the beef business and the production of desirable products for an ever-demanding consumer. The ever-increasing number of traits and numbers can be a challenging hurdle for even the astute beef producer.

In contrast, a recent agricultural publication, grabbed at random off the shelf had 41 classified ads for bulls. In this case, the most common information provided is who to contact and the age of the bulls. Scattered throughout the classifieds are common expressions of performance, generally weight related or a reference to pedigree.

Print can be a detriment because forcing people to read too far into an ad limits the advisability of putting too much information in an ad, but once located, most breeders can provide data designed to make bull selection easy. At the Dickinson Research Extension Center, the annual selection of bulls or at least available semen is always on the calendar by March.

As with any decision making process, finding the time to gather data and make the correct decision is an ongoing challenge. As with many producers, the day-to-day demands on time erode the necessary time required to make key management decisions.

Sire selection, though, can be very simple because of the amount of information available. Making the job simple, however, this means placing trust and confidence in the numbers provided by the breed associations.

The Center commonly utilizes several breeds of cattle in various breeding programs. In reviewing the breed information and individual bull performance information, only two major pieces are really needed. The data needed are benchmarks or averages for the various traits within the breed and the individual sire's values for those traits.

Many organizations that market bulls or semen from their bulls highlight or mark the traits in which a bull excels. The particular rankings may vary. One publication may mark all traits for a bull that are in the upper 25 percent of the breed; others may mark the upper 10 percent, upper 5 percent or even the upper 1 percent. The rankings for each bull are generally marked by using color codes or simple notations printed for each bull.

When the Center was picking a bull to be used on heifers, once a particular breed was identified, in this case Red Angus, the review of all the bulls listed was fairly simple. There were 13 traits listed and the selected bull had 11 of the 13 circled as being in the top 25 percent of the breed. This included calving ease in the upper 10 percent of the breed and birth weight in the upper 25 percent. For a bull to rank first in every trait would probably be a biological fluke, but to rank high in several traits is certainly a solid trend in the right direction.

In today's complex trait data for bulls, two major categories are always present. They are a summation of growth followed by an indication of carcass desirability. A third category is added when the issue of breeding for replacement females is added to the mix.

In general, the selection of bulls that have consistently high rankings for growth (i.e., over 25 percent) are readily available. Within this pool of bulls, sires can be selected with acceptable carcass characteristics, making production and product trends within the industry positive. The replacement formula is more difficult, depending on producer location and objectives within breeding programs, but rest assured the tools are there.

Time is tight so keep it simple and go with bulls that lead the industry. They are very available. Leave the bottom half of the bulls for the feedlot.

May you find all your USAIP 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 BT0191.

BFCK Cherokee Canyon 4912

Expected Progeny Difference (EPD) values

BW - birth weight	-1.3
WW - weaning weight	37
YW - yearling weight	66
MILK - daughter's milk	20
TM - total maternal	38
ST - stayability	12
HPG - heifer pregnancy	13
BFAT - back fat	0
REA - rib eye area	0.49
MARB - marbling	0.22
ME - mature cow maintenance energy requirements	-2
CED - calving ease direct	9
CETM - calving ease total maternal	0

Please reference the Red Angus Web site for sire evaluations: www.redangus.org