

Bull-buying Homework: Study Numbers, Make Good Choices

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The bull season is ripe and bulls are ready for picking. Buying bulls is serious work because the bull has more impact on your calf crop than any individual cow.

Sometimes that statement will bring about a quick response from those who have spent time developing cow families within a herd. After all, the cow does need to raise the calf and do all the work.

While cows are the heart of the herd and ultimately pay the bills, the fact remains that genetically the bull directly affects every calf he sires. As most producers know, good, fertile bulls can sire many calves.

The sire of your calves contributes 50 percent of the genetics of the calf. At the same time, the maternal grandsire of the calf (the dam's sire) theoretically contributes 25 percent of the genetics of the calf. If one keeps working down the bottom side of the pedigree, additional sires would keep popping up.

The mother of the calf represents all these previous sires in her pedigree. The maternal grandsire and great-grand sire still tend to have an influence on the herd and each year's calf crop. In a general sense, it is often stated that the last bull purchased represents 50 percent of the calf crop, the second to last bull purchased represents 25 percent of the calf crop and the third to the last bull purchased represents 12.5 percent of the calf crop.

If one sums up the impact of the last three bulls purchased, the sum of all the impacts is 87.5 percent. As the saying goes, the bull is the source of potential genes. These genes change the herd output and relevance to the industry. Bull buying is a serious business.

So how complicated is bull buying? Not bad, but still one has to shop around and use the tools required.

Recently, the North Dakota Stockman magazine arrived in the mail. Almost every page had a bull advertisement and the edition was noted as the largest in the magazine's history. Bulls are available; it's picking the right one that counts.

Many Simmental bulls were featured in the magazine, and a lot can be learned before loading up and

heading to a bull sale. If you are looking for Simmental bulls, start paging through the magazine and refamiliarize yourself with the various breeding programs. You should log on to the Internet at www.simmental.org/ and review the percentile tables for the nonparent bulls for the traits of interest.

For example, pick a percentile level. If you wanted to know the expected progeny differences (EPD) value for the nonparent bulls that would represent the upper 25 percent of the nonparent bulls within the Simmental breed, find the 25 percent level in the table and follow the line. You will find the first value represents calving ease and a bull would need to be a 7.5 to make the 25 percent cutoff.

Similarly, you will find the birth weight with an EPD value of 0.6 pound, a weaning weight of 39.3 pounds, a yearling weight of 67.9 pounds, a maternal calving ease of 4.1 pounds, maternal milk at 8.3 pounds and a maternal weaning weight of 26 pounds. Additional traits are listed, so one can get the feel for bull evaluation.

Other factors may influence your decisions, but why deal with low-quality bulls of any breed? Start at the top and select from there.

As you get more comfortable using the numbers, expand your selection criteria or start exploring the newer index EPDs that are available. Bull selection is never to be taken for granted; learn the numbers and make the right choice.

Now sit back and enjoy reading the bull advertisements, but have the advertisement in one hand and the ranking table in the other.

May you find all your NAIS-approved 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 BT0281.

**Adapted percentile table for
Simmental EPD Non-parent Bulls**
from the Spring 2006 Simmental Evaluation

Percentile Level	Calving Ease	Birth Weight	Weaning Weight	Yearling Weight	Maternal C Ease	Maternal Milk	Maternal Weaning Weight
5	10.4	-1.0	46.8	79.9	6.5	12.4	31.0
25	7.5	0.6	39.3	67.9	4.1	8.3	26.0
50	5.6	1.8	34.1	59.5	2.4	5.4	22.4
Average	5.6	1.8	34.1	59.5	2.4	5.4	22.4
Low	-18.4	-5.2	-0.9	1.4	-11.4	-18.0	1.0
High	15.0	10.2	70.4	110.7	12.5	25.0	45.7

Source: www.simmental.org