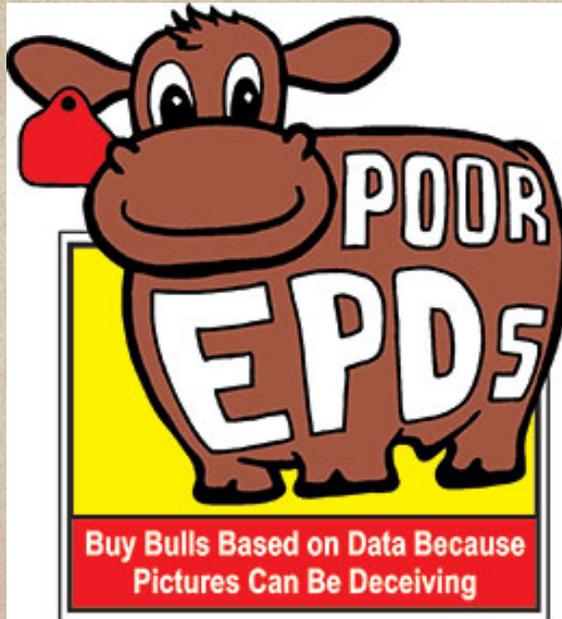




BeefTalk 647: Buy Bulls Based on Data Not Pictures

SUPPORTING MATERIALS



The process of buying bulls actually is, or at least should be, fairly methodical. Although data terms may baffle a bull buyer, always check out what the trait abbreviations and the many expected progeny differences (EPDs) values mean. The breed association websites have good glossaries or just ask other breeders.

There certainly is no shortage of bull pictures. Have you ever wondered just how many bull pictures can be printed in one magazine? A lot, and despite the added color and enhanced graphics, bulls still look like bulls. Yes, there are some subtle differences. To the trained eye, those differences may be notable, but still, there seems to be more similarity than differences in many of the bulls.

We enjoy pictures, but we also should enjoy data. Bulls may be very similar in phenotype, in other words the picture, but their genotype may have no similarity at all. Even the color, although fairly indicative of the DNA on one chromosome, may have no indication of what DNA is on the other chromosome. Because all chromosomes are paired, the calves that the bull produces each will be products of only one of the chromosomes. Therefore, black cattle certainly can sire red

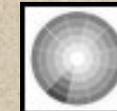
calves.

In terms of the many other traits, the variation within the particular lot of bulls can be extreme, even though all the bulls look alike. Some bulls have high-growth DNA, others low-growth DNA. Some bulls will have DNA more likely to produce prime to choice grade calves, while a very similar looking bull may only produce select or low choice grade calves.

Although muscle quantity and expression may be observed in the phenotype or picture of the bull, the ultrasound data indicating rib-eye area, often expressed as rib-eye area per hundred pounds of live weight, certainly will tell the same story.



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The point is that true bull selection rests with understanding the data. The action of buying bulls should be a process of sorting through the data first and then looking at the bull. Every single piece of data is directly connected to a strand of DNA somewhere on the chromosome. Positive selection pressure on the correct traits will increase positive DNA within our bull stud. In turn, this DNA will combine with the DNA available in the cow herd to produce the calf crop.

Therefore, the process of buying bulls actually is, or at least should be, fairly methodical. Although data terms may baffle a bull buyer, always check out what the trait abbreviations and the many expected progeny differences (EPDs) values mean. The breed association websites have good glossaries or just ask other breeders.

A personal pet peeve: If there is room for the picture, there should be room for labeling conveniently the various numbers to make the reading of the information more doable. All of these notations lead up to some very important notes. Right up front, a herd should present in the catalog the average EPD values for the various traits the breed evaluates followed by the average EPD values for the bulls and heifers being sold.

Additional information could be provided for the breed, such as the trait values for the top 25 percent of the breed or maybe even the top 1 percent of the breed, depending on the strengths of the bulls or heifers.

For the new bull buyer who is not aware of the breeders within a breed, those producers who are willing to print the average EPD values for the calves they are selling make the initial screening so much easier. Of course, one does need to look at the individual numbers.

However, there is something to keep in mind. Why not start with those herds that are selling bulls or heifers that are above average for the desired traits? There is no quicker or easier way to evaluate the expected future performance authenticity of potential bull candidates. Once the overall performance of the herd has been determined in relationship to the breed as a whole, one can select the desired bulls within the sale offering.

Now that one knows the average value for all the traits analyzed within the breed, the process of finding and sorting bulls based on their ranking within the breed is relatively easy. The job is to find the sale prospects by scanning all the sons of the reference sires that meet our criteria and then scanning all the bulls for their own performance because the cow and bull ultimately determine the genetic value of the bull.

Through the years, one vote of confidence is that it is obvious more people are picking the top bulls because the bidding dollars seem to jump quickly on bulls that lead the data. That is a good thing for the industry but a little frustrating when the wallet doesn't have an equivalent roll of money.

Keep in mind that no picture is going to relay the information that is needed. Only breed association EPD data will, which is critical in making long-lasting bull decisions. Great bulls have great numbers. Learn to read them and just don't bid on poor bulls.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at <http://www.BeefTalk.com>. For more information, contact the NDBCIA Office, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to <http://www.CHAPS2000.com> on the Internet.

