BeefTalk 719: Not all Bulls Are Herd Bulls

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

Positive Outcomes from Progressive Planning

Seven Neutered Bulls

After a summer on grass	1,179 pounds
After 88 days on feed	1,636 pounds
Gain per day	5.2 pounds
Dry feed conversion	5.3 pounds

Dickinson Research Extension Center

Some bulls are herd bulls and, more than likely, the herd bulls are at the top of the sale list.

Most bulls can fill feedlot pens, but some are herd bulls and some are neither. Every year, the competition in the bull pen gets tougher, so some bulls need to leave.

At the Dickinson Research Extension Center, seven long, yearling bulls needed to leave. They were neutered and weighed in at 1,179 pounds after a summer on grass. Last fall, they were sent to the feedlot and weighed 1,636 pounds after 88 days on feed. They gained 5.2 pounds per day and had a dry feed conversion of 5.3 pounds.

The point is that there are opportunities for the excess bulls other than a long winter in the bullpen. Neutering and feeding those excess yearling bulls is a viable option. As cow numbers dip, so should bull numbers. The only purpose a bull has is to breed cows so they will conceive calves. With fewer cows, fewer bulls are needed.

Although not a highly technical study, the other day I was looking at the sale ads and could not help but note the number of bulls listed. There would be no problem finding a bull because many seedstock producers still are selling. Granted, most bull sales are over, but private treaty sales are plentiful.

In addition, a fair number of 2-year-old bulls were listed. Two-year-old bulls are not uncommon but may not be the bull of choice for most seedstock producers to market because the additional 12 months of expense needs to be subtracted from the sale price.

Sometimes the market may justify the extra year. However, quick comparisons of the average 2-year-old bull value versus the yearling are seldom exciting. And what does one do with a 2-year-old bull that does not sell?

That being said, the Dickinson Research Extension Center has a good inventory of bulls. Unlike a private producer, as cows are assigned to research pastures, the number of cows in each pasture are small. However, every pasture needs a bull, so that is why the center has a larger bull inventory.

We still haven't answered the question about what to do with the extra bulls. At the center, once everything is allotted

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for the summer, the extra steers are put on grass. Any unused bulls are neutered and also added to the inventory of steers on grass. In addition, yearling bulls may be neutered once they no longer are needed as breeding bulls. The rationale is that the center wants to minimize the number of bulls that are kept through the winter.

How did these bulls do from start to finish? This past year, the center ended up with 27 steers on grass. Seventeen of those were neutered bulls. Following the summer on grass, all 27 head were shipped to the feedlot in late October.

As a pen, the neutered cattle weighed 1,072 pounds and were valued at $1,501. They were fed for an average of 102 days and gained an average of 4.3 pounds per day, with a dry feed conversion of 5.6 pounds. Their calculated shrink weight at harvest was 1,512 pounds and were valued at $2,126. What was interesting is that the top 25 percent of the lot was neutered bulls.

In general, the neutered bulls did well feeding alongside the grass steers. Obviously, markets will vary from year to year, but seedstock producers always need to anticipate bull demand for next year. Reviewing the sale results is critical to help next year's planning.

The center ships cattle to feedlots for finishing and the reports that come back from the feedlots are divided into three parts. The reports are broken down to the top 25 percent, middle 50 percent and the bottom 25 percent of the cattle on feed.

In the bull business, seedstock producers should do the same. Those bulls that are in demand should top the sale and be on the upper 25 percent list. As was noted at the beginning, some bulls are herd bulls and, more than likely, the herd bulls are at the top of the sale.

Most cattle producers need good bulls to conceive calves that fit today's market. These would be the middle 50 percent of the bulls offered for sale. What about the bottom 25 percent of the bulls that are offered? Are they selling and, if so, should they be sold as bulls?

In today's data-driven world, bulls can be screened quickly and easily. As producers slowly adopt the data, the ability to screen multiple bulls from several seedstock producers evolves, along with offsite bidding and purchasing.

Those bulls that do not fit as herd sires or are not good bulls to fill commercial feedlots should be settling to the bottom of sale value.

Perhaps, after reviewing this year's sale results, a critical eye can sort and neuter more bulls for grass and feedlot options. Fewer bulls, more demand.

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.