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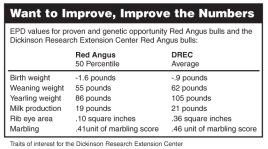
BeefTalk: Step 1 for Bull Buying: Red Angus Example

I like to start with the basic growth traits, which are those "touchy, feely" traits that connect what I see in the cattle to what the data is trying to tell me.

Images



Want to Improve, Improve the Numbers

By Kris Ringwall, Beef Specialist

NDSU Extension Service

As cattle producers, pondering where those good cattle come from is a good thing. Even better is pondering where those not-so-good cattle come from.

At the Dickinson Research Extension Center, I try to keep updating the expected progeny difference (EPD) values for the current bulls and occasionally updating the historic bulls.

For example, using the center's Red Angus bulls, the breeding inventory from this past breeding season included five bulls. Their year of birth and

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columns

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registration numbers are: 2013-born bulls, 1617778 and 1617805; 2011-born bulls 1473021 and 1473096; and 2010-born bull 1393949.

The EPD values had changed slightly for some of the traits, but certainly not enough to have changed the value of the bull for involvement in the DREC breeding program.

The procedure for finding information on the Red Angus Association website (http://redangus.org/) is very simple. All one needs to do is type in the registration numbers or cut and paste all the numbers at once by following the "animal search" tab under the "data searches" tab on the association's home page.

How and where do these bulls fit into the world of beef? I like to start with the basic growth traits, which are those "touchy, feely" traits that connect what I see in the cattle to what the data is trying to tell me. If I can comprehend those traits and accept them for real, then, as time goes on, I have an easier time accepting more complicated traits that are not so easy to connect to.

In other words, one really needs to trust that the data through one's selection is directing the operational genetic focus. At the Dickinson REC, I like to use four baseline traits because they are simple growth traits that certainly meet the "touchy, feely" criteria.

The four traits are EPDs for birth weight, weaning

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weight, yearling weight and rib-eye area. In addition, I usually list the milk and marbling EPDs as tag-along traits because they have huge impacts within the genetics of the beef business.

The average Dickinson REC Red Angus EPD values for these traits are obtained by looking up the bulls by registration number and writing down the current values for the bulls or putting the values in a spreadsheet and then doing the math to obtain the average value.

For the center's Red Angus bulls, the average EPD value for birth weight is -0.9 pound, weaning weight is 62 pounds, yearling weight is 105 pounds, milk production is 21 pounds, rib- eye area is .36 square inch and marbling is .46 unit of marbling score.

These values set the stage to review previous managerial decisions that were made when buying bulls. Without too much data ado, the calves are acceptable and delivering the desired genetics. How does the average genetic input that the center is receiving from these bulls compare with Red Angus bulls? Good question. To start, one needs to look at the average EPD values for proven and genetic opportunity Red Angus bulls on the Red Angus Association website.

The Red Angus 50 percent EPD value for birth weight is -1.6 pounds, weaning weight 55 pounds, yearling weight 86 pounds, milk production 19 pounds, rib-eye area .10 square inch and marbling is

.41 unit of marbling score.

As one compares the average genetic values for the center's Red Angus bulls to the 50 percentile values from the Red Angus Association sire summary, the center bulls have a slightly heavier birth EPD by .7 pound, heavier weaning weight by 6.8 pounds and heavier yearling weight by 19 pounds.

The center's bulls have the ability to sire heifers that add pounds at weaning through milk production because the center's bulls have a 2-pound heavier milk EPD than the 50 percentile Red Angus proven and genetic opportunity bulls.

In addition, the center's Red Angus bulls had an additional .05 greater EPD value for marbling score and .26 additional square inch of rib-eye EPD value.

This is an example of the process that any producer should be able to duplicate and then find his or her own registration numbers to check out the EPD inputs going into the herd. Realizing that each producer can pick any trait or index to include on the evaluation sheet for past bulls, the process is the same regardless of what traits are used.

However, do not overcomplicate the process. Too many numbers written on a page can cloud the mind. These are the EPD values that impact the performance of the herd. If you want to improve, improve the numbers and use EPDs as the tool.

May you find all your ear tags.

For more information, contact Ringwall at 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/news/columns/beeftalk/.

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Attachments

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