

NEWS

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NDSU Extension Service

BeefTalk: Sire Selection Decisions Have a Long- Term Impact on the Herd

By Kris Ringwall, Extension Beef Specialist,

As the bull sale season gets into full swing, the importance and magnitude of those buying decisions weigh heavier on individual producers.

Most cattle producers know their local bull suppliers both professionally and personally. Many are neighbors or joint cooperators in the many projects that exist in rural communities. Why so much thought? Well, these bulls will sire the foundation for beef opportunities in the future.

In a lot of ways, beef producers are like those people who can juggle three or four balls at one time. The juggler starts with one ball, catches it with one hand, then two balls, one for each hand. Most of us would stop there. But occasionally, the juggler will switch hands and eventually three balls, and

even four balls, will be going.

Bull buying decisions are no different, and the purchasing decisions linger for a long time.

At the North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension Center, we have 118 calves born in 2000 on feed. These calves, from the bulls purchased in the spring of 1999, have the largest single impact on the center's operation today, drawing \$1.74 per head per day as of Jan. 31. The feed efficiency and gain of that pen of steers is critical to the center today.

Let's look at the second ball needed to juggle--the bull that sired today's calf. The Center's cows started calving Feb. 3. This calf, and all the rest of them born this spring, currently demand the most labor. Talking to the herdsman this time of year, you only get one of three comments: "They aren't very big, but at least they're alive." "Don't you ever breed to that bull again." Or "She's a good mother, I told you we needed more like her."

Choices made in purchasing last year's bulls are "in your face" today. That dripping wet calf is a direct result of your efforts at selecting bulls, and you can't help but wonder if the calf really looks like that outstanding glossy print of the sire you picked. Fortunately, you remind yourself, that even as a newborn calf, the truth is in the genes you selected not the picture.

Enter the third ball. The phone rings and you are reminded you need to start looking for the bulls to sire next year's calf crop. Like juggling, most of us can handle two balls relatively well, the third one gets challenging. It's not that you can't keep it going, it's just that the first two balls won't let you concentrate on the third one.

You have a heifer that should have calved an hour ago, an old boss cow that just ran the dog and you out of the pen, and you open the mail and get a dead slip from the feed yard. And now, someone wants you to give them \$3,000 for a bull. But, the cycle must continue.

The bulls that are bought this year will sire the spring of 2002 calf crop and return the cash on the rail in 2003. Projecting ahead on future trends in beef, and then designing a program to meet those trends is challenging. Adding value to cow-calf beef production is both simple and complicated. The rewards are still in the finished product: the ability to lay claim to that tender, lean meat product that provides your neighbors their needed nourishment.

In the end, the success of the producer's juggling is not known for two years. That is why it is important to know the numbers and what they mean and make informed decisions. It will cut down on the worry and cause one to miss fewer meals worrying about whether to add another bull to the juggling act.

Well, speaking of nourishment, the local bull sale has lunch at noon, so I better collect my paper work and go check out the bulls. May you find all your 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 BT0027.

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When you will see the impact of your bull-buying decision?		
Year Bull Purchased	Birth Weight Weaning Weight Evaluation	Yearling Weight Harvest Evaluation
1999	2000	2001
2000	2001	2002
2001	2002	2003

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