

Bull Shopping Can Be a Success with the Right Data

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The signs of a new breeding season are apparent at the North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension Center. Heifers are scheduled for their final prostaglandin injection on May 27; the mature cows on June 10. The dates of these estrous-prompting hormone injections represent a 21-day shift to later calving.

Injections for the cows may need to be split into two days, depending on labor availability. We'll use the same protocol for breeding cows that we've used for several seasons. The cows will receive an injection of gonadotropin releasing hormone (GnRH) on June 3, followed by the prostaglandin injection. The cows are timed inseminated to Angus bulls and exposed to Hereford clean up bulls as soon as they are out of standing heat.

Roughly half of our cows conceive by artificial insemination to Angus sires. The rest are sired by the Hereford clean up bulls, which means the cleanup bulls must be a significant part of our breeding program, not just another bull to get the cows bred.

I'll note here that there are many cattle breeds to select from. Our selection of Angus or Hereford is not to indicate the superiority of any breed. You need to select the breed that fits best with your enterprise and marketing plan. The Dickinson Research Extension Center does need to breed cows in a consistent, well-planned manner. A random assortment of various breeds wouldn't reflect the way most ranchers manage their herds and it wouldn't help us in our mission of research and demonstration.

Our marketing plans call for all the calves to be fed out to finish, and all heifers retained until breeding. Extra heifers are sold as grass yearlings.

Bull selection starts with the breed. The Hereford, when used in a defined crossbreeding system, allows the Center to capitalize on the effects of heterosis and assures a calf, depending on sex, suitable for retained ownership in the feedlot or as a replacement heifer. In selecting bulls to follow a timed insemination program, the bulls need to sire calves capable of rapid growth, be well-muscled, and have reasonable birth weights. In addition, the female calves will be held for replacements and the steers fed until harvested in a commercial feedlot.

A review of the American Hereford Association Average EPD values for young sires was in order. The research center's Hereford bull inventory lists 18 bulls with an average birth

weight EPD of 7.2 pounds, weaning weight EPD of 44 pounds, yearling weight EPD of 75 pounds and milk EPD of 15 pounds.

For young bulls within the Hereford breed, the average birth weight EPD is 3.8 pounds, weaning weight EPD of 35 pounds, yearling weight EPD of 59 pounds and milk EPD of 13 pounds .

The shift to a later calving date will limit calving checks to once a day. Bulls with a lower value for birth weight and a greater yearling weight would be beneficial. To accomplish this goal, before traveling to the local bull sale, I selected nine bulls with an average birth weight EPD of 4.4 pounds, weaning weight EPD of 49 pounds, a yearling weight EPD of 82 pounds and milk EPD of 17 pounds. The bulls were also required to gain more than 3.5 pounds per day and have a ribeye area per hundredweight of body weight greater than 1 square inch.

As with most desires, price and budget impact the end result and seven of those nine bulls averaged \$3,628 -- more than our budget could stand.

But, given the excellent set of records available at the sale, we still came home with nine bulls, two that I had previously identified and seven additional bulls. The bulls we purchased had an average birth weight EPD of 5.1 pounds, weaning weight EPD of 48 pounds, yearling weight EPD of 80 pounds and a milk EPD of 15 pounds. The nine bulls had an average of 1.13 square inch ribeye area per hundredweight of body weight and an average daily gain of 3.18 pounds.

While the bulls weren't exactly the bulls I set out to buy, the bull sale was a success. We purchased an excellent set of bulls that will increase weight in our calf crop to offset the later calving date while producing slightly lighter calves at birth. As an additional benefit, the ribeye area per hundredweight of the bulls went up, which should be a positive when the calves hit the rail.

Well the bull pen is full and it's time to work the calves. 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 BT0140.

Hereford Bull EPD Values

NDSU Dickinson Research Extension Center

	Birth Weight	Weaning Weight	Yearling Weight	Maternal Milk
Breed Average*	3.8	35	59	13
Current Bulls	7.2	44	75	15
Purchased Bulls	5.1	48	80	15
Center Gain	+2.1	+4	+5	0

* Young Bulls