

Buy Bulls that Graduate at the Top of Their Class

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Maintaining a decent line up of bulls for natural service is a fun challenge. Knowing the genetics behind each bull and the contribution each bull is going to make to the bottom line of your operation is very important.

For all practical purposes, no bull should be kept to simply settle cows. A spare sire is a good plan, but it is important that the extra bull is as good as the main lineup.

Some bulls that sire calves actually lose you money. If one of these bulls resides in your bull pen, then it's better to sell an open cow than allow her to conceive a calf of inferior quality that eventually becomes a liability rather than an asset to the operation.

The Dickinson Research Extension Center maintains a full line of Hereford bulls as natural service sires. These bulls, purchased locally, are well adapted to the environment. The Herefords work well for the Center, but any breed would work, and each producer needs to make their own pick of the wide variety of breeds available.

The bottom line is to utilize bulls with understandable production information and genetic predictability. Using the Hereford bulls at the Center as an example, the performance of each bull can quickly and efficiently be accessed at the American Hereford Association Web site, <http://www.hereford.org>.

Most breed associations have easily accessible Expected Progeny Difference (EPD) information. Looking at their Web sites allows for quick comparisons. When the American Hereford Association Web site is accessed and the EPDs printed, the average for the respective age groups are printed at the bottom of each inquiry, allowing for immediate evaluation of the respective bulls.

For the DREC 2004 spring EPDs, the average that was printed for selected traits were: calving ease direct, -0.5 percent; birth weight, +3.8 pounds; weaning weight, +35 pounds; yearling weight, +60 pounds; milk, +13 pounds; milk plus growth, +31 pounds. A producer can quickly roll his or her eyes and scream at the many numbers, but take a deep breath and bear with the evaluation process. The time spent is money in your pocket.

The evaluation of younger bulls is often less accurate since the volume of data from their progeny is not available. Using average values for groups of young bulls will strengthen the accuracy of selection and provide more assurance that the average of the calves produced will perform as indicated by the average of the sires utilized in the breeding program.

At the Center, the Hereford breeding lineup stacks up quite well. In terms of growth, the current 11 sires average 50 pounds in weaning weight and 83 pounds in yearling weight. The progeny of these bulls should be excellent growth cattle, with their sires ranked within the top five percent of the Hereford breed. Milk, although not quite as high, is at 14 pounds and milk plus growth is 40 pounds. These statistics put this group of bulls above average for milk production within the Hereford breed and in the upper 15 percent of the breed for milk plus growth.

If there is a concern, the group averages 5.9 pounds for birth weight, placing them in the heavier birth weight category, with a calving ease score of 91.9 percent, or 75 percentile within the breed. However, performance is high and Center calving difficulty, the ultimate score, is low. In fact, in reviewing the calving records, no mature cows have been assisted to date.

Breeding programs need to be designed to balance growth and calving difficulty. The Center bulls are getting that job done. The gate is soon to be opened, the cows and bulls co-mingled. With data, the calves are already designed, and as far as the bulls and cows, well, put it this way, they can take it from here.

May you find all your USAIP 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 BT0192.

Dickinson Research Extension Center Spring Hereford Bull Lineup

Performance Trait	DREC Bull Average	Hereford Breed Average	DREC Bull Ranking
Weaning weight	50	35 pounds	Upper 5%
Yearling weight	83	60 pounds	Upper 5%
Milk	14	13 pounds	Upper 45%
Milk plus growth	40	31 pounds	Upper 15%
Birth weight	5.9	3.8 pounds	Upper 90%
Calving ease direct	-1.9%	-0.5%	Upper 75%
Calving assists	0		