

Index Traits Can Simplify Bull Purchase Procedure

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The bull sale tour is well under way. Producers are pouring over the myriad data offered in sale catalogs and warming up the pickup as they prepare to shop for new genetics for their cowherd.

Since sires have the most direct influence on the cowherd, the right bull is an important step. Shopping this year is easier with the addition of index methodology offered by some of the breed associations. This index methodology evaluates traits and is the perfect complement to bull buying for producers who utilize individual expected progeny difference (EPD) values.

Buying bulls is not a simple science, unless one doesn't track performance. The real paradox here is that if performance is not tracked, it is even more critical to purchase proven bulls.

Because sires have a profound impact on the cowherd, the bull buyer has more influence on the future of the operation than those who don't buy bulls. Within operations that have several hired hands, there is prestige to have the privilege of selecting and buying the future bulls for the operation.

The calf crop, and the cowherd from which the calves are born, are simply more controlled genetically through good sire selection. Everyone seems to have a mindset of what bulls they like. Some, even today after volumes of data, say otherwise and pick a bull only based on phenotype (looks).

Selection based on phenotype still takes advantage of the genetic change within a breed. Phenotypic selection, if measured, is sporadic in nature and will help producers head in the general direction of the average of the breed. In other words, if the breed a producer selects is getting bigger, picking bulls without data still will tend to produce bigger cattle.

Data usage has given buyers new evaluation means. Most producers do use data, but the data keeps changing and the terms do not remain the same. This change in data management and terms is a positive outcome.

Those involved in data management, particularly as the size of the data sets grow, are constantly searching data for better ways to select animals. The EPD scale has been the industry standard for several years.

A producer figures and figures again, looking at the increasing list of performance traits available and mentally tries to combine whatever his or her mind will allow for picking the right bull. For instance, one bull may have the growth traits desired, but may be slightly lower in a desired carcass trait. Perhaps the bull is good for all growth traits, but since replacement heifers will be retained from the bull, the maternal traits increase in importance and not all good-growth bulls have good maternal traits.

How does one decide? Long hours of homework is necessary; however, several of the breed associations are doing the work for you with an index.

The indexes, which could be called the economic selection indexes or other terms associated with the dollar value of the traits of interest, certainly can streamline the process of selection. The physical joy of selecting a bull on sale day does not need to go away.

The proper homework in advance can lessen the gamble, so a producer can shop, bid smart and reap the rewards. The process is here. Take a good look at these new index values and ask some questions.

Review the bulls selected on previous selection criteria. How do they rank on the new selection index EPDs? Again, look and ask some questions. Perhaps life just got simpler for a change.

May you find all your NAIS-approved 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 BT0287.

New Bull Selection Traits

Simmental - All-Purpose Index (API)
Terminal Index

Angus - Weaned Calf Value (\$W)
Grid Value (\$G)
Feedlot Value (\$F)
Beef Value (\$B)