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BeefTalk: Bull Buying Basics – The Package Counts, Not the Wrapping

A well-wrapped package sells well, but don't forget, it's what's in the package that counts.

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Buying bulls can be simple if we can separate the wrapping from the package. The package is what counts, but many times we get all “wrapped up” in the way the package looks.

This is very similar to buying the perfect gift and then spending hours picking out the wrapping paper. We spend a lot of time on the wrapping paper, so much in fact that we may run out of time buying the right gift.

In reality, we don't keep the wrapping in the beef business. What is inside the wrapping is what gives the package real meaning.

The industry today has adopted and implemented a genetic selection process called expected progeny differences (EPDs). EPDs are based on a thorough statistical evaluation of actual data. The data started appearing in bull catalogs years ago.

Through the years, the concept has caught on and is now the basis for determining just what is in the package, despite the wrapping. The data makes it easy for producers to compare EPDs from one bull in a breed with another bull in the same breed.

After comparing data, producers quickly can calculate the expected progeny differences of the two bulls being compared. (Across-breed comparisons can be made if the EPDs are correctly adjusted. However, that is another BeefTalk column.)

The expected progeny difference is expressed for each particular trait in the common language used for the trait. For example, growth traits generally are expressed in pounds, while height traits are in inches and ribeye size in square inches.

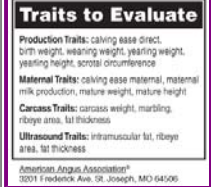
There are many traits. The American Angus Association lists EPDs for calving ease direct, birth weight, weaning weight, yearling weight, yearling height, scrotal circumference, calving ease maternal, maternal milk production, mature weight, mature height, carcass weight, marbling, ribeye area, fat thickness, and ultrasound intramuscular fat, ribeye area and fat thickness.

Every one of these EPDs can be utilized to compare different bulls by comparing the differences in the EPD values. Given all the traits, many breed associations have further simplified sire selection by creating and calculating multitrait selection indexes to further help producers in their selection process.

The index EPD values can be compared across bulls. If one is in the business of breeding beef, within an arm's length of the desk chair are publications with information on bulls and their individual EPDs.

The “Spring 2008 Pasture to Plate Genetics” publication published by ABS Global Inc. arrived recently. ABS is one of several companies that market cattle genetics covering several breeds.

Images



Traits to Evaluate

On page 39, individual Angus bulls are listed as curve benders and growth. The data on these bulls would have been analyzed by the American Angus Association. If one goes to the Web page of the American Angus Association (<http://www.angus.org/>), it is easy to locate the same numbers for these bulls. It also has a detailed explanation of the traits. These are growth bulls and one quickly can glance down the rows and compare the bulls.

The first bull listed is Extra K205 and has a listed weaning weight EPD of plus 55. The second bull listed is Alliance I87. He has a listed weaning weight EPD of plus 63.

In terms of weaning weight, the second bull listed is predicted to produce calves that average 8 pounds heavier than calves from the first bull listed. As producers of beef, one probably does not need to utilize all the genetic information that is available on sires today. However, the more one understands, the more likely one will be pleased with the outcome.

Yes, the wrapping is important. A well-wrapped package sells well, but don't forget, it's what's in the package that counts.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at <http://www.BeefTalk.com>.

For more information, contact the NDBCIA Office, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to <http://www.CHAPS2000.com> on the Internet.

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Attachments



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