

BeefTalk 495: Raise the Beef You Want by Buying the Genetics You Need

A purchased bull that does not meet your desired production outcomes sets the operation back another year and another calf crop, and leads to missed opportunity.

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Time does not allow us to absorb everything in one setting. For example, it often is best to read one chapter at a time in a book so one can absorb as much as possible. Bull buying is like reading a good book. It is best to do it one chapter at a time.

Chapter one starts with the bull. The bull's looks are his phenotype. Underlying the phenotype are genes that form the mold from which the bull was made.

We want the bull's genes to match or pair up with the genes our cows carry to produce next year's calf crop. Thus ends chapter one.

Chapter two contains the pictures of the many phenotypes of the cattle we want to look at. The chapter has headings that show different breeds so that similar-type cattle can be viewed together.

Subheadings include various traits and colors of the different breeds. If one was to reminisce, the older encyclopedia Britannica included several pages of black and white images of cattle breeds.

I wore those encyclopedia pages thin. My imagination pondered just how these different cattle, some very different from the common breeds in the upper Midwest, could exist. Today, the images are on the Internet. Chapter two is now completed.

Chapter three involves genes. These are things we cannot see, at least with the naked eye. The pictures give way to more text, long words and complicated formulas.

Words such as mendelian genetics, chromosome, deoxyribonucleic acid and mixed models frequently appear. Mathematical formulas prove to be long and interesting. As we fall asleep for the evening, the third chapter ends.

Morning brings renewed vigor and desire. We skip a few chapters full of details and look for applications.

What drives us is not so much how things are but how things affect us. In the concluding chapter, the clutter is gone and we are back to two final points.

Bulls have known genetic backgrounds. These backgrounds are displayed as numbers that represent traits and value, at least in terms of expected progeny differences (EPDs). First, decide what level of performance is wanted. Then perform a quick check of the percentile tables within the various breeds and make a notation on the table of what is acceptable.

The line is drawn. With known EPD targets and a quick check of the available bull sales, the fun begins. As the bull catalogs arrive, the easiest tool to grab is a colored highlighter.

Knowing the targeted EPD values and the traits one wants to work on within the herd, the highlighter is used to mark each trait that meets the targeted EPD value. When one gets done, you now know those bulls that are available that are predicted, with reasonable accuracy, to carry the genes you want to buy.

Prior to sale day or even on sale day, review the marked bulls for structural soundness, temperament and other desired traits. After a lengthy time studying all the genetic information available for the bulls, the final step is here.

Open the checkbook and make sure there is enough money to buy the desired bull or bulls. A list of acceptable bulls is always best to avoid overpricing a particular bull and assures a better outcome. One hopes the sale was good and a purchase was made.

Perhaps the biggest mistake made at bull sales is the tendency to give in and bid on a bull that was not on one's list. Sit tight and scan ahead at other bull sales to see what is available.

A purchased bull that does not meet your desired production outcomes sets the operation back another year and another calf crop, and leads to missed opportunity.

The best motto is to raise the beef you want by buying the genetics you need.

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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Six Quick Steps to Bull Buying

- 1 - Understand the difference between a bull's appearance and the genes he carries
- 2 - Enjoy and appreciate the phenotypes of the many types of cattle
- 3 - Learn or at least appreciate the science of genetics
- 4 - Review as needed the many details of selecting cattle
- 5 - Apply what one learned and select potential bulls
- 6 - Balance the checkbook and buy the bulls