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BeefTalk: Prepping for the Bull-buying Season

Genetic uniformity starts at home by selecting good bulls through knowledgeable and informed selection and implementing focused production goals for clear outcomes relevant to beef cattle production.

By Kris Ringwall, Beef Specialist

NDSU Extension Service

I am going to say this three times: A producer does not need to know all the mathematics, justifications or scientific “who done it” aspects of breed association expected progeny differences (EPDs). These EPDs are available to all purebred and commercial producers, so use them. The behind-the-scenes professionals will fine-tune this terrific tool for beef producers.

Images

These are Real Numbers!

Average nonparent Angus bull EPD value for:	
Birth weight	1.8 pounds
Weaning weight	49 pounds
Yearling weight	85 pounds
Milk production	24 pounds
Rib eye area	.46 square inches
Marbling	.47 unit of marbling score

Now, elevate the percentile thresholds and raise the selection pressure.

Dickinson Research Extension Center

These are Real Numbers! Now, elevate the percentile thresholds and raise the selection pressure.

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The other day, while watching cattle sell, the variation was obvious. This is not to say that all variation can be managed, but the thought of the genetic source of the cattle certainly was on my mind.

Single-colored cattle do not mean similarity in genetic background. For example, black hair coats are the result of a dominant allele, so technically, all cattle need is one allele or gene to express a black hair coat. While there are many modifying genes, the bottom line is hair coat color has nothing to do with overall genetic uniformity in beef cattle. So what does?

It begins by accepting the fact that all bulls are not created equally. Bulls may look similar, but they are not genetically equal. Genetic uniformity starts at home by selecting good bulls through knowledgeable and informed selection and implementing focused production goals for clear outcomes relevant to beef cattle production.

A visit to the many breed association websites proves the point. Because we started discussing cattle with black hair color, let's go to the American Angus Association website at

 <http://www.angus.org>.

Like many websites, the association's business affairs are up front. There are opportunities to market calves or even get involved with the breed. However, associations are larger than simply

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use of releases

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managing a breed of cattle. The association is the home of the genetic database.

For the second time: A producer does not need to know all the mathematics, justifications or scientific “who done it” aspects of breed association expected progeny differences (EPDs). These EPDs are available to all purebred and commercial producers, so use them. The behind-the-scenes professionals will fine-tune this terrific tool for beef producers.

Let’s continue at <http://www.angus.org>. Although there are multiple ways to get to the Angus EPDs, let’s find the tab that references “Management.” Click on it and move down to the “Sire Evaluation Report.” Click on the “Sire Evaluation Report” and a screen will come up that lists several interesting options.

This will be the primary screen needed by someone looking for bulls. A review of traits available can be found at “How to Read the Results – Definitions.”

The definitions are needed to remind producers how the selection of a particular trait will impact future beef cattle performance. The definitions are not complicated, but understanding them is important, particularly if a producer chooses to use the index traits that associations have developed.

Let’s keep it simple, at least for the traits we want to review. We want to find the genetic information available on bulls. Again, do not get lost in the

numerous additional tabs. Go back to the "Sire Evaluation Report" and we will end this discussion on the "Breed Averages for EPD and \$Values" table.

Those numbers are indicative of the average EPD value for each particular trait. Knowing those numbers will help a producer meet production goals.

For the Dickinson Research Extension Center, the traits of interest for the average nonparent Angus bull include EPD values for birth weight of 1.8 pounds, weaning weight of 49 pounds, yearling weight of 85 pounds, milk production of 24 pounds, rib-eye area of .46 square inch and a marbling score of .47. Those are real numbers. However, the real question is how to raise the percentile threshold selection pressure while still being able to afford the bull.

For the third time: A producer does not need to know all the mathematics, justifications or scientific "who done it" aspects of breed association expected progeny differences (EPDs). These EPDs are available to all purebred and commercial producers, so use them. The behind-the-scenes professionals will fine-tune this terrific tool for beef producers.

The competition is using EPDs, so use them to find the right bull, pay the right price and sell the right calves.

May you find all your ear tags.

For more information, contact Ringwall at 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to

<http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/news/columns/beeftalk/>.

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Attachments



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