

Bull Sale Season Has Begun; Start Your EPDs

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When the green flag signals the start of a car race, the drivers mean business. The start is not the time to be meandering across the race track, eating popcorn and admiring the surroundings because you may get run over.

The start of a new year signals a similar start in the beef business—the start of the bull sale season. The purebred breeders are lined up, the bulls are growing and sale catalogs are posted. The target is the commercial producer and an array of tactics, including glitter and flash, are acceptable. Bulls that shine sell. After all, no one wants to buy a used bull. (For health reasons, you shouldn't buy a used bull.)

Private treaty sales, traditional auction sales, silent auctions and choreographed production extravaganzas make bull buying an entertaining art. Private sales generally involve a quiet one on one lunch, the auction sales provide cafeteria beef and the extravaganzas serve an evening banquet. All of this hospitality is comforting and filling (thank you) but this trademark of the bull season does not have much to do with buying a good bull.

There are good bulls, acceptable bulls and bulls that should be steers. The trick is to know the difference. Most bull operations will sell bulls until the buyers quit buying, at which time the remaining bulls are returned to the pen for desperation purchases later. Interestingly, genetically good bulls sell, but some don't, poor bulls sell and some don't. Sorting them out requires producers to do some homework, and start looking at the Expected Progeny Differences (commonly called EPDs).

Our data at the North Dakota Dickinson Research and Extension Center would indicate profit in the total beef business depends on producing a carcass of maximum weight allowed within the particular grid's specification and obtaining that weight as quickly as possible. The carcass needs to also meet the quality and yield specifications within the chosen grid. Which bull will sire the calves to obtain your goal?

All possible scenarios cannot be described here, but assume a producer needs a bull to sire calves on a terminal grid. The cows are all mature cows, so a heifer bull is not needed, and no carcass data will be collected.

In other words, yearling size or weight becomes a key point as the indicator of growth potential.

This is where the purebred industry has made bull buying simple. EPDs were designed to allow bull buyers the ability to rank bulls for various traits. Selecting a group of appropriate bulls that meets individual needs can be achieved before the green flag is waved, avoiding any mass confusion and battling the heat of aggressive ring men.

A producer can selectively bid and, hopefully, obtain the desired bull from the selected group and go home the proud owner of a shiny, glitzy bull that will genetically sire the right calves.

Do your homework. Start with a basic concept; for every average number, about half the animals exceed the average and about half are below average. For example, of the current sires listed, the 50 percentile value (commonly called average) Angus sire yearling weight EPD is 62 pounds, for Gelbvieh 61 pounds, for Hereford 60 pounds, for Red Angus 50 pounds and Simmental 58.5 pounds. The various breed associations can be easily located by going to www.cattletoday.com on the Web and selecting the association tab.

In your own quest, look up the average value of the breed of your choice for trait(s) important to you. Do not compare the values between breeds, but rather make sure the numbers on the bull(s) you plan to buy fit your operation. In general, run the numbers for all traits and do yourself a favor—stay with the above average bulls.

So, enjoy the food and hospitality, but pass on the below average bull. You might suggest the cook buy him for next year's sale.

May you find all your 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 BT0075.

Average (50 percentile) Yearling Weight EPD Value for Active Sires

Breed	Yearling Weight EPD
Angus	62 pounds
Gelbvieh	61 pounds
Hereford	60 pounds
Red Angus	50 pounds
Simmental	58.5 pounds

Breeds selected are for illustrative purposes only. Links to cattle breed EPD values can be found at www.cattletoday.com.