

EPDs Are Road Signs for the Beef Producer

By Kris Ringwall
Extension Beef Specialist
NDSU Extension Service



I always enjoy the questions and comments that I receive from BeefTalk readers. I admire how electronic devices allow us nearly instant communication.

For most of us, however, the human mind still operates at speeds somewhere between the era of stone tablets and the industrial revolution. The bottom line: I physically can't respond to all the e-mails or mail. However, I certainly appreciate the input. Reader input can provide the ideas for future columns, so please keep the emails (or letters) coming.

Recently a producer responded with a concern on estimated progeny differences (EPDs). The individual noted "I still don't know how to put the EPDs together. I have papers on my cows. I have a birth weight, 205 day weight and yearling weight and the calf was from artificial insemination, so I have the EPD on the sire. So how do I come up with the EPDs on my calf?" His is not an uncommon question.

To begin, beef producers should ask if their current herd and output of calves is meeting expectations. The point in the previous question "to put the EPDs together" is a tough one. Each producer must answer the question. We drive and like different types of cars. Each of us has a reason why we drive what we do, but in reality, as long as the car meets our expectations, we will keep on driving it.

The same is true for beef cattle operators. When driving a car, the driver needs to know the rules of the road and read the signs along the highway. The signs announce what is coming: a curve, crossroads, hills, etc. The driver reacts to the signs to provide for a safe and enjoyable ride.

EPDs are the signs for the cattle producer. Just like controlling a car, managing a beef operation requires knowing the rules of production and heeding the signs.

Some times I need to slow down a trait. I may reduce the weaning weight EPD. Maybe I need to speed up feed yard growth so I accelerate (increase) the yearling weight EPD. I may not be getting enough milk

from the cows, so I increase the milk EPD. I would like more calves to grade choice, so put the pedal to the metal and increase the marbling EPD. The calves are too big at calving, so I put a governor on the throttle and set a threshold for the upper limit of birth weight EPD.

Having guided young drivers, the most anxious moments are those which require all one's senses to act and react simultaneously in a controlled decisive manner. Bidding on bulls is no different. I must know the cow herd and the calf output and only use the EPDs to gently allow me to guide future production, tweaking a point here and there, adjusting to the curve and then head down the straightaway to the finish line.

All traits are important so balance is necessary, but knowledge about what trait(s) a producer needs to tweak is important. The finish line, for the cow-calf producer, is cattle that grow fast in the various environments in which they are fed, put the maximum allowable weight on the rail, and meet the respective grid quality and yield expectations. Each producer picks the targeted end point and develops a cow herd to sustain the end point using additive and complimentary genes.

You buy bulls for their genetics and develop a cow herd for sustainable production. Don't watch the neighbor. Train your pit crew to spit shine the operation; you take control of the accelerator and put EPDs in your gas tank.

The absolute value of a calf's EPD is not the end product of using EPDs. Evaluate the current calf crop, identify the weak points and then purchase new bulls that have the EPDs to fix the weak spots. 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 BT0079.

Road Signs to Profit

Weaning
Weight EPD
35 MPH

Yearling
Weight EPD
58 MPH

Birth
Weight EPD
2 MPH

