

Rapid Food Product Changes Demand Close Attention to Bull Selection

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Reading is a very important function. For those who don't like to read, old habits are hard to break. What becomes obvious in reading circles is that life is a circle. Repetition is prominent and what goes around comes around and you only have to wait.

Experience has taught me that cattle cycles last about 10 years and so do fads. Occasionally, think tanks are convened and new ideas pour forth for a life-saving cure, which happens only rarely. Real change is in the placement of small pieces in the big picture, not in finding a new picture.

Reading really is managing information overload. To the left of my desk is a stack of papers that has its own ever-changing aura beckoning, but distant. I succumb to the call and pick up a protruding magazine edge, in Stagnito's New Products Magazine - Food and Beverage From Concept to Consumer. I

The cover story, 'Five years later - Where are they now?' captures my eye. I become immersed in the story and what strikes me is the pace of change in the food industry. The food business is competitive, filled with product diversity, product color and product wording designed to create an atmosphere of glamour. Author Catherine Penn noted, 'Overall, one of three new products released will survive at least five years.' Consumers demand change. Their palates are not easy to please. That is a lesson beef producers can take to heart.

The beef business is constantly striving for new efficiency, new products and new forms of outreach while maintaining a cow that only changes when she gets 10 or more years old. The contrast is enormous: the fast-paced world of food versus the slow cud-chewing cow, leisurely strolling through the pasture, having recently conceived to a great bull. Even in the bull business, change does not happen quickly.

I perused four of the current AI sire directories with a simple question, 'When were the first five bulls in each catalog born?' The average birth year (rounded to the nearest year) for each of the four companies was 1997

for ABS Global, Inc. and 1996 for Select Sires, Alta, and Genex Cooperative, Inc. The average birth year has no merit in discussing the value of the bulls presented by each organization, but simply reflects the time needed to present a product (in this case bulls) with confidence to the bull-buying public.

As beef producers, the production side of the business is the store from which we operate. That store is not easily built, but once established accuracy in bull selection for future consumer acceptance is critical. The slower the process, the more critical and costly are management mistakes. As a producer, buy proven genetics. Products, on the other hand, once actually submitted to the general public's palate, must survive in Stagnito's New Products world, not in the beef producer's world.

With only one out of three products surviving the test of time, the quickest way to a downward trend line is reduced product development. In the 'Best Off' update in 'Stagnito's New Products' was a list of products you may have seen: Queen Anne Jubilees, Chill Jam, Mountain Dew Code Red, Farmland Ground and Browned Beef, Simply Orange, StarKist Lunch to Go, P.B. Slices, Alta Dena Yo-Burst, Birdseye Simply Grillini, Super Stuffers, Thunder Chips, Healthy Choice Bowls, Pretzel Fillers, and Jennie-O Thanksgiving Tonight.

Go the supermarket and check out these and more products. The test of time would say less than five of the 14 will be here in five years. Products will change and bulls will stay but let's do what we can to keep beef products on the upside of the trend line.

Read. It is amazing what you find out. Do you know what Fibregum is? 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 BT0098.

Average Birth Year of the First Five Bulls in the 2002 AI Sire Directories

ABS Global, Inc.	1997
Select Sires	1996
Alta	1996
Genex Cooperative, Inc.	1996

Birth year rounded to the nearest year.

