



BeefTalk 633: Bigger Is Not Always Better

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

- Two Angus Bulls - Which Would You Pick?		
	Bull A	Bull B
Weaning weight EDP	+74	+18
\$ weaning index	+40.77	+29.11
\$ cow energy value	-20.07	+33.63

The comparisons can be numerous, but the urge is always there to pick the best.

Perhaps the beef business is not unique. However, each year, when the students gather to study beef production, they are geared to determine what is right. Many think they already know. This bull or that bull, this steer or that steer, this cow or that cow.

The comparisons can be numerous, but the urge is always there to pick the best. Unfortunately, the question often is wrong or the answer already is assumed before the question is asked. Students compete with each other as they compare

predetermined or engrained concepts of what is best.

In class the other day, two Angus herd sires were presented to the class. The herd sires were taken by chance from two websites of two different Angus breeders. Each student was asked to compare the bulls.

Cutting to the chase, one bull (A) had an expected progeny difference (EPD) for a weaning weight of plus 74. The other bull (B) had an EPD weaning weight of plus 18. An engrained response was evident because all nods went to bull A. This means that bigger and better would be the motto. Bull A is in the upper 1 percent of the breed for preweaning growth, while bull B is at the lower end.

Checking the Angus Association website, the weaning index EPD for bull A was plus 40.77 (upper 2 percent of the breed). For bull B, it was plus 29.11 (upper 35 percent of the breed). The weaning index did not change opinions.

Checking the Angus Association website again, we looked for the cow energy value (\$EN). Bull A's \$EN was minus 20.07, while bull B's \$EN was plus 33.63. In terms of breed ranking, the bulls had completely reversed. Bull B was in the top 2 percent in the Angus breed, while bull A was at the lower end.

The class was silent, at least momentarily. A real challenge was presented with these two bulls. Bull A led the way for growth, but is sacrificing maternal issues, while bull B led the way to impacting the maternal side of the breed but is sacrificing growth.



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In fairness to the students, the discussion did acknowledge the dilemma. As the years pass, experienced cattle producers understand the need to genetically balance the cow herd. Likewise, in earlier years, various breeds of cattle evolved with more focus on selected traits.

The early split was between maternal breeds and paternal (or terminal) breeds. It was fairly well understood that one breed would have difficulty in meeting the needs of the complete package.

In today's beef world, producers tend to be more single-breed orientated because they are looking for the complete package within that one breed.

What is interesting, as was noted with the genetics students, is the presence of variation. The point being, if a producer seeks the right information and obtains the right data, correct decisions can be made to steer the cow herd.

Perhaps the overriding factor in today's drought-driven, expensive feed scenarios is that increased attention needs to be directed to the cow herd. The pounds of feed delivered and utilized by the cow herd impact the bottom line.

Therefore, at least for today, the students could ponder that bigger is not always better. When one compares bull A, a trait leader for weaning growth, versus bull B, a trait leader for cow energy values, astute producers will search the Angus database for a better balance between the two traits.

The next day's assignment for the class was to find a bull that would achieve the desired outcome of growth but not at the expense of cow efficiency. The next class period brought home some good bulls that did balance growth and cow efficiency.

The bottom line for the students is to know the needs of the herd and then ask the right questions to find the right bull. The bull business is competitive and, unfortunately, that means one bull producer against another.

Sometimes lost in the discussion is the bull buyer. Thanks to the many breed associations, bull buyers of today do not need to get lost in the flurry of information and fluff of the sale. Breed association websites contain well-compiled information on almost all the bulls within the breed.

There is no need to find out by paying excessive feed bills that the base cow herd is inefficient. In a matter of minutes, one can type in the registration number of the bulls used on the appropriate breed association website to gain a good understanding of the genes that have been selected and placed in the herd. The only one responsible is the producer.

Buying the right bulls will position one to be better prepared for the next drought. Bigger is not always better.

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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