



BeefTalk 698: Live Bait is Not Needed to Catch Fish

SUPPORTING MATERIALS



For beef producers fishing for bulls, welcome to the bull-buying season.

Catching fish does not always require the use of live bait. In fact, the use of lures of many types and sizes has led to the many storefronts filled with fishing gear. If one is keen on enjoying fly fishing, the artificial fly would more than likely be named and cherished.

Some would say they do a lot of contemplating while fishing. While contemplating, one's mind should ponder about things. In the beef world, perhaps it is all right to ponder on bull selection.

What do bull selection and fishing have in common? Not much. However, to make the point, fishermen have developed many ways to catch fish. They utilize things, such as chicken feathers, that really have nothing to do with fish. However, the feathers work really well.

For beef producers fishing for bulls, welcome to the bull-buying season. The tackle box is full of tackle, favorite lures and some brand-new flies, and the tools to buy bulls are ready to be read, applied and used.

While fly fishing, I doubt many ever ask where the live bait is because they don't need it. Meanwhile, for bull buying, there still seems to be a strong desire or need to physically see the live bull, which is not a bad thing. However, if the desire to visualize the bull takes one away from the need to evaluate the data regarding the bull, then one should ponder some more.

The tools for buying bulls are proven and certainly work. The genetic trend lines and the emergence of well-founded and well-researched bull lines that have proven performance are real. However, within the industry, there still is this willingness to purchase bulls that do not have the data to support their performance.



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The pondering on bulls comes more in the form of a question than perhaps a direct statement. Why would a producer who is striving for calves that grade “choice” purchase bulls with known expected progeny differences (EPDs) for marbling that are at the lower end of the breed?

Why would a producer want to keep heifers back as replacements and have adequate feed to support milk, then purchase bulls with known EPDs for milk that are at the lower end of the breed? Why would a producer who wants to improve herd weaning weights continually purchase bulls that are below breed average in weaning weight EPD values?

In a marbling conversation the other day with others, we were discussing a bull that certainly had the desired phenotype and growth genetics that would be very acceptable in anyone’s herd. However, the bull is a low-marbling bull. This bull’s EPDs did not support or have evidence that it would contribute in a positive manner to the herd’s improvement or even the breed’s status quo. However, the desire remained to use the bull.

Bull purchases are a personal choice. That always must and will be true. However, if the data suggests that the bull does not have the EPD values that support the use of the bull for the genetically desired goal, the goal will not be met. The point is that EPDs are the best tool beef producers have to gauge the underlying genetics. The underlying genetics are totally a function of the DNA embedded in the bull’s cells. There is no magic to it. The bull will pass on only the DNA that is present.

In some respects, EPDs are the chicken feathers that make good fly fishing lures. Fisherman don’t use real flies and cattle producers don’t use real DNA. Instead, both use well-developed techniques that work to get at the established goals.

If there is a take-home message other than “go fishing,” it is that when one goes to select bulls, review the data first and make a list of those bulls that have the EPDs of the desired genetics. After that, go look at those bulls. However, more and more bull sales are made sight unseen with an excellent guarantee that the buyer will be satisfied.

How do bull breeders make this claim? It’s easy. They stack the genetics in every bull they sell with proven sires. The package is genetically loaded, so there should be little surprise with the delivered package.

The future of the cattle industry rests with the ability to engage a well-informed and somewhat demanding consumer. Placing any cattle within the market chain that don’t meet those expectation runs the risk of turning a customer away.

There is no need to do that in today’s world. Use the full EPD tackle box to select bulls that will sire calves that are desirable through the whole marketing chain. When everyone is content, just maybe those fishing will take some steak with them to grill after they come in from a successful day of fly fishing.

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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