



## BeefTalk 704: It Pays to Read the Tag

### SUPPORTING MATERIALS



*Data is essential for finding the desired genetics when selecting bulls.*

Early discussions of animal breeding and selection always grouped producers into three types, which were the breeder, multiplier and commercial producer.

Generally portrayed as a pyramid, the base represented the large group of commercial producers who are in the business of producing products for the consumer. These producers would obtain breeding stock from the second level within the pyramid.

The second level represented those producers who specialized in expanding the population of breeding males and females. Their principle source of income was selling sires and replacement females to the commercial producer. As a general rule of thumb, commercial producers would neuter all male offspring and, in some cases, even sell all the female offspring.

As one would climb the pyramid, the top represented the elite breeders, those breeders who offered breeding stock to seedstock producers for propagation. Our agricultural friends use the same process because crop producers may be involved in or have access to breeder, foundation, registered or certified seed.

At the top of the pyramid is crop breeder seed, which is the product of an intense selection regime that commonly is referred to as the first generation. The seed is kept under close supervision to allow for appropriate regeneration to assure a source of the seed. As the seed is further prepared for distribution, foundation seed is produced or maintained to assure adequate preservation of the genetic traits and associated purity of the seed.

As a genetic line of seed expands to commercial production, just like cattle, there needs to be a level of production that focusses on the distribution of the traits unique to the seed and provides assurances that those traits are maintained and available in the purchased seed.

Thus, the production of registered seed, which is seed that is the progeny of foundation seed and bears a high



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probability that the goals of the original breeder are met. Still not at the volume needed for commercial production, certain producers become certified seed producers to produce certified seed. These producers go to great efforts to assure certifying agents and their customers that they have met a satisfactory expectation and their seed contains the genetic traits the original breeder desired to offer to the industry. There is the assurance that the seed is pure and not significantly modified from the original stock.

This process has been going on for more than a century in livestock and plants with the expectation of producing copious amounts of food to feed people.

As beef producers, the process is not as structured as the system of genetic improvement and implementation that our agricultural friends have honed. Nevertheless, the process still is with us. What is it? Breed associations and expected progeny differences (EPDs).

A breed association is a group of breeders who take seriously the responsibility of exploring, finding and propagating genes. Those genes, organized strands of DNA and reported as EPDs, guide breeders and seedstock producers to produce cattle that fit the current needs of the commercial producer. Thus, the genes are available for commercial production to work within the extended industry and ultimately provide food for people.

As cattle producers shop for those genes, it is easy to see what cattle or sires have the needed DNA. In contrast to the agricultural industry's structured process for certified seed, bull buyers depend on breed associations.

Both processes work well. Breed associations derive from their data sets the EPD values that bull buyers need to have the assurance that the genes they want are present. Meanwhile, if one reads the tag on a seed bag, the tag tells the producer what is in the bag.

At the Dickinson Research Extension Center, we read tags. We know what is in the bag or, in this case, under the hide. The current Simmental tag says birth weight 2.2 pounds, weaning weight 78 pounds, yearling weight 109.9 pounds, marbling score 0.07 and rib-eye area 0.99 square inch. The Red Angus tag reads birth weight minus 0.5 pound, weaning weight 61 pounds, yearling weight 104 pounds, marbling score 0.43 and rib-eye area 0.38 square inch.

As a commercial user of bulls, the center needs to have access to data to find the genetics desired to meet the center's goals. Breed associations provide and meet that need. Just like our farming friends, with proven bulls or certified seed, it pays to read the tag.

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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