



BeefTalk 706: Big or Little Socket?

SUPPORTING MATERIALS



Having a socket set that only has large sockets makes no more sense than only buying bulls that are trait leaders for growth.

As calving season comes to the forefront, bull buying starts to wind down and thoughts of summer grass start to come to mind. After a long, cold winter, those spring turnout activities will be especially enjoyable.

However, following any season, repairs need to be made and an assortment of tools are needed to manage the farm or ranch. The other day, I opened the tool chest to address some spring adjustments and needed a particular socket. I could not find the 3/8-inch socket, so I decided to buy a new socket set.

When I got to the store, the assistant was nice enough to show me the socket sets. However, I noticed the sets no longer had any 3/8-inch sockets. In fact, the store only carried socket sets that started at 1/2-inch or greater. With the ever increasing size of equipment, the store apparently felt that smaller sockets no longer were needed. I left

perplexed but reminded of a question a student asked in class the other day as I was discussing expected progeny differences (EPDs).

The assignment for the students was to select a bull. As the bull selections were discussed, it became obvious that there was a strong tendency to select leaders for the various traits, which are those bulls that rank the highest for EPD values. More specifically, when asked to justify the reasoning for buying a trait leader for weaning weight, the response indicated a need for growth.

That is a true statement, but a second statement was noted that was not true. A student said that if a bull ranked low in weaning weight EPD, the bull's calves would have no growth. That is not a true statement and, at least on my part, made me frown, if nothing else.



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Bulls, just like the tools in a tool chest, have a purpose and specific use. What would be the sense of buying a socket set that does not contain a full selection of sockets? The wide variety of tools in a tool chest is needed to be able to repair or tweak the daily operations of a ranch. Having a socket set that only has large sockets makes no more sense than only buying bulls that are trait leaders for growth.

Cattle operations must be tweaked constantly to maintain cows that produce the right calves and produce income. Producers shouldn't have limited choices when it comes time to find the right tool in the toolbox or limit themselves to a certain set of genetics in a bull.

Perhaps, at least in the classroom, a better understanding of the percentile tables and bull rankings would be good. However, a fundamental principle in school is rank, which is the process of achieving the highest percentile possible for a grade. Even if a student does not achieve 100 percent, the student still has an innate desire to achieve a grade as close to 100 percent as possible. However, students, regardless of grades, are striving to do good, prepare themselves for the future and find a niche that leads to the good life.

Likewise, bulls that are ranked on percentiles within the breed are not meant to be utilized as an absolute selection tool. Rather, producers need to sort through the tool chest and use all the available EPDs to guide and tweak the genetics within the herd. Unfortunately, we still have a strong tendency to default to the concept that someone or something must be the winner, so the winner becomes the ideal to follow. That is why the socket company quit making smaller sockets.

Upon graduation, the student wants to hang up the diploma alongside those of his or her parents. However, the frame is tightly secured with 1/4-inch bolts.

The fundamental error in thinking that was bothering me was the ease at which we remain committed to only those bulls that are trait leaders. Ultimately, the thinking needs to be rerouted so there is a better understanding of beef breeding systems and how the various genetic packages fit an individual's operation.

Maternal cow traits are very important and ultimately determine the foundation of a cow herd. Paternal bull traits also are important but it must be buffered with the ultimate destination of the calf.

Feedlots appreciate the opportunity to add more growth to existing calves because replacement feeder calves are in tight supply. From the cow-calf perspective, the cow outlives market trends.

The producer ultimately has to create a balance between market demand and ranch production efficiency. It is a constant struggle, but a struggle that will be overcome successfully if all the tools are in the tool chest, including a full set of sockets.

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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