

## The Annual Bull Buying Season Starts—Time to Bone Up on EPDs

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At this time of year, most producers are preparing for the future as they gear up to purchase bulls for their cow herd. These purchases, which start with solid relationships between the seed stock supplier and the commercial beef producer, have a huge impact on the future of the beef business.

The livestock periodicals are filled with bull advertisements. The business of selling bulls is very competitive and lots of prospective bulls are at the bunk being fed for their two minutes in the sale ring.

Not all of the evaluating can be done ringside. The bottom line in bull buying is that one is purchasing the DNA, in other words the genetics, that a particular bull will pass on to the calf crop. The DNA is evaluated for most production traits utilizing “expected progeny differences (EPDs).”

By comparing the value of an EPD for one trait from one bull to the next, a bull buyer can quickly get a feel for the relative likelihood that a bull has the needed DNA to work in a producer’s program. While the development of EPDs is complicated, the application of EPD numbers to bull-buying techniques is reasonably straightforward and simple.

If the bull’s structure is sound and has the capacity and desire to breed cows, the objective is to bring home the bull with the right DNA that matches producer expectations of next year’s calf crop, as well as the fat cattle some 20 to 24 months from now.

As producers of cattle, we are involved, on a daily basis, with production and management decisions that influence the type of cattle we raise. The end result is many individual opportunities to create the right mix of genetics (DNA) to meet the local criteria involved in the management of the farm or ranch where the cattle are produced.

A major focus for most producers, more often than not, is the cow. The cow is a long-term commitment. Her presence will grace the countryside for years. Cre-

ating the right cow is essential because a cow must meet the rigors of her environment head on and survive, produce a calf and rebreed on time consistently.

The selection of the bull that goes with each cow and the appropriate evaluation are really the essence of the management that allows producers to make permanent change within the operation. Changes include the gradual replacement of the cow herd and producing calves that meet the current demand at the marketplace.

This process has been greatly enhanced and streamlined by the inclusion of EPDs, but sadly cattle often are presented for sale without the EPD information listed. The utilization of EPDs still lags and often is misunderstood, even after several years of educational efforts by all the major breed associations.

One case in point, a recent publication came across the desk that had 76 bull advertisements in it. Only 35 ads actually presented some type of EPD information on either the bulls being sold or the sires of the bulls being sold. Forty-one ads listed no EPD information, but relied on sire names and key words to promote their cattle.

There is no question that some bulls are well-known in the industry and bull buyers will shop for sons of certain bulls. Yet, the EPD information is a very simple way for anyone to peruse a lot of information quickly and locate breeding programs that may have an early indication of being relevant to one’s own operation.

EPDs are modern tools to give a solid indication of the genes or genetic makeup of a bull and ultimately that is what one is buying. The bottom line, use EPDs and only buy the right DNA.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at <http://www.BeefTalk.com>. For more information, contact the NDBCIA Office, 1133 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to <http://www.CHAPS2000.com> on the Internet.

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## **Bull Advertisements**

<b>With EPD values</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Without EPD values</b>	<b>41</b>

Numbers compiled from a single livestock publication.