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BeefTalk: Kick Some Straw and Read the Book

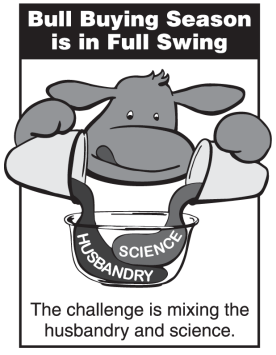
Genetics is a vital part of cattle production.

By Kris Ringwall, Beef Specialist

NDSU Extension Service

As another bull-buying season comes into full swing, several thoughts pop up while kicking straw in the bullpen.

Images



Bull Buying Season is in Full Swing

First, many good commercial bulls, backed by strong data numbers that are real, are available and will help producers move toward predetermined production goals. Commercial producers who do not utilize the information available on commercial bulls simply add risk and unpredictability to obtaining their desired production outcomes.

That being said, producers still have reasons to

nd state fair

4-H State Fair Results

columns

Renewable Accounts: Renewable Accounts: Solid Biofuels, Part One (2016-02-02) Solid biofuels and their associated environmental policies may have an impact on North Dakota farmers. FULL STORY

BeefTalk: BeefTalk: Am I Satisfied? (2016-02-04) Saying you are happy, satisfied and content with what you're doing is OK. FULL STORY

Prairie Fare: Prairie Fare: Take Steps to Avoid Kitchen Fires (2016-02-04) Don't leave the stove or cooking appliances unattended when being used. FULL STORY

select bulls based on traits that are not readily available nor in the breed databases. Interestingly, no one ever bluntly denies the use of data, but one most certainly can sense a presence of denial at times.

Second, the goals and objectives of any breeding program must be well-defined and obtainable so producers and the beef industry can search for new genetics, wherever it resides. The search, although generally through the existing databases, certainly is not limited to those databases because finding new genetic options may reside in nontraditional cattle. Those options can be found as a variety of genetic packages that are available to commercial buyers.

Finding the genetics to meet the goals and objectives is a challenge animal breeders take very seriously because the wrong bull and cow mating may derail the desired outcome, which may be years in the making. When breeding a cow, a producer knows that the result goes through the first year of pregnancy, the second year of rearing, the third year of maturing and finally an opportunity to initiate another breeding.

That commonly is called generational interval, and for cattle, the generational interval may be several years. The selection of the right bull and cow is critical.

In my years of research, I can recall spending

hours in the office selecting the right animals for the right pen based on the numbers provided. And, at the same time, those doing the chores, opening the gates, helping the babies, treating the aliments and providing the husbandry that comes with good animal care would do the same.

My list was written; theirs more likely was committed to memory. When comparing the lists regarding animals that actually ended up in the pens, we always made some compromises, but we had remarkably little difference in the final list. Good livestock management always will be a combination of husbandry and science. One does not exclusively choose one over the other.

As beef production progresses, the industry needs to mesh totally with husbandry in the field but be street smart to the pending science that expands our understanding. As much as I do avoid it, I cannot help but keep an eye on the other side of the fence, watching other livestock production and selection methodology.

Husbandry is scrutinized critically if the science overwhelms husbandry. But if one avoids the science and data, appropriate husbandry improvements may fall to the wayside.

A good case in point is the poultry industry's response to consumer demands. The production of white eggs is still the norm. But if one reads an article expounding the benefits of extensive

outside poultry production, the pictures most likely will be a set of red-feathered hens with some white on them that lay brown eggs.

If one reads an article expounding the benefits of intensive-confinement poultry production for the production of brown eggs, the pictures will show red-feathered hens with some white on them.

Interestingly, that red-feathered hen has more data behind her breeding than is ever obvious. Let me simply say the “Red Production” birds, so often seen in backyard flocks, most likely come from the same genetic program the large extensive and intensive “Red Production” type birds come from.

Checking the various breeding lines, poultry production is heavily dependent on the crossing of selected breeding lines of parental stock with the commercial product made available to all types of production. Backyard, intensive or extensive production all will sell into the same market.

The point, before one quits reading today, is that the beef market is a very large commercial business. The genetics involved in commercial production filters through a breeder’s network of seedstock producers. Seedstock breeders have the ability to explore and challenge production units with new and exciting genetics. Commercial producers have the ability to pick sires that meet their objectives. The challenge is mixing the husbandry and science. That is, read the sale

book, check the data and kick some straw.

May you find all your ear tags.

For more information, contact your local NDSU Extension Service agent (https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/extension/directory) or Ringwall at (701) 456-1103 or kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu.

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Attachments

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