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BeefTalk: Bull Selection and Managing Risk



Reduce the risk by buying the right bull for your operation.

By Kris Ringwall, Beef Specialist

NDSU Extension Service

Consider this an invite to help beef producers manage risk.

The greater the risk, the more likely the selected choice is wrong, and as producers, we want to minimize risk.

Bull buying involves risk because a bull without the desired genes will not meet management goals for expected calf performance. Bull buying risk can be minimized by understanding the available genetic data for the desired bull through the implementation and utilization of the associated tools to access that data.

Images



Don't Just Attend a Bull Sale, Attend a Bull-buying Workshop to Lower Risk in Buying the Right Bull.

columns

[Spotlight on Economics: Spotlight on Economics: What is Big Data in the Context of Agriculture?](#) (2016-12-02)

In layman's terms, big data are beyond the storage capacity and processing power of a common machine or computer. [FULL STORY](#)

[BeefTalk: BeefTalk: Bull Selection and Managing Risk](#) (2016-12-01) Reduce the risk by buying the right bull for your operation. [FULL STORY](#)

[Prairie Fare: Prairie Fare: Here's How to Dine Out Healthfully](#) (2016-12-01) You can cut calories and still enjoy eating out. [FULL STORY](#)

[Small-business Savvy: Small-business Savvy: Enjoying Local Foods and Local Farmers](#) (2016-12-01) Local foods also are small businesses. [FULL STORY](#)

Although risk never can be eliminated, bull selection workshops through the North Dakota State University Extension Service (as well local Extension efforts across the country) are offered to help producers decrease the risk of buying the wrong bull. These small workshops provide two to three hours of interaction with producers to help them better understand current opportunities to select bulls.

The workshops provide the ability to spend two to three hours with a few producers at a time. As producers express their goals and objectives regarding their current bull needs, time can be spent explaining the tools that are available to better meet each producer's goals and objectives.

Producer minds have opened as they come to better understand what the available numbers mean. A review of each producer's previous bull purchases reveals how successful each producer was in meeting current genetic benchmarks within the herd. The outcome: spending money wisely.

These workshops do not set producer goals and objectives because the beef industry has many goals and objectives. Obviously, positive financial outcomes are desired, but even then, short-term objectives may seem less profitable, but in the long run, they produce a more profitable herd.

So bull selection season is here and it is homework time.

use of releases

The news media and others may use these news releases in their entirety. If the articles are edited, the sources and NDSU must be given credit.

A strong tendency still exists to go with one's gut feeling and bypass available individual bull data. Why? The three main reasons could be as follows: first, a general lack of understanding of what the data mean and how to apply the data; second, a lack of how the data can be integrated and evaluated against individual herd goals and objectives; and third, a residual feeling that what is visual is easy to understand. Thus, an appreciation of historic concepts is solid and keeps producers satisfied.

Bull selection has not changed since cattle were domesticated. For most of those centuries, a bull was needed to mate with and settle cows. Through time, a quick visual evaluation of the bull's reproductive track became sufficient, but keep in mind, producers had no scientific understanding of fertilization and conception until recently in the timeline of the domestication of cattle.

We still need to remind ourselves of one very simple principle established well in excess of 200 years ago by Robert Bakewell: "Like produces like or the likeness of some ancestor; inbreeding produces prepotency and refinement; breed the best to the best." And so the breeding of domestic cattle began in earnest, and the early progenitors of today's cattle breeds were established and subsequently set.

The same principle works today, especially when

buying bulls: “Breed the best to the best.”

Another scholar from the past, Sir Francis Bacon, said, “Read not to contradict and confute, nor to believe and take for granted, but to weigh and consider.” These are good thoughts when buying bulls and bear repeating: “Breed the best to the best.” and “Weigh and consider.”

Unfortunately, the simple part has become complicated because the amount of information currently available can be mind-boggling. But remember, reviewing numbers and setting one’s objective still is based on selecting the bull that has the best opportunity to meet the herd objective. A critical element for future success of beef operations involves reducing risk, so sign up for a bull selection workshop.

The workshops encourage producers to better understand where they are, based on historic genetic inputs, and develop a selection plan that will move or maintain their production objectives. Ultimately, they will minimize the risk of spending money on the wrong bull.

The process a producer utilizes should maintain the principles that are core standards of the operation. Each individual cattle operation has its own wealth of knowledge regarding the operation and management of the farm or ranch and the type of cattle needed.

But today, instead of going with one’s gut feeling

and accepting historical risk, one actually can lower the risk associated with spending money on bulls. Keeping current on sire selection tools is the key, and learning these keys can have a very positive impact on reaching long-term objectives. The opportunity is real, and so is the benefit.

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 the Dickinson Research Extension Center, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601; 701-456-1103; or [✉kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu](mailto:kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu).

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Attachments



[PDF - Don't Just Attend a Bull Sale, Attend a Bull-buying Workshop to Lower Risk in Buying the Right Bull.](#)

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[EPS - Don't Just Attend a Bull Sale, Attend a Bull-buying Workshop to Lower Risk](#)

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