navigation

Links

- News Home
- Columns
- Archives

Feeds

- All News RSS
- BeefTalk RSS
- Dairy Focus RSS
- Prairie Fare RSS
- Economics RSS
- Renewable Accounts RSS
- Small-business Savvy RSS

Twitter

- On Twitter follow NDSU Ag News

BeefTalk: Bull Selection and Obtaining Historical Benchmarks

Knowing the herd's genetic benchmarks is critical.

By Kris Ringwall, Beef Specialist

NDSU Extension Service

In life, knowing your goal determines your route to achieve that goal.

Images

EPD Benchmarks for Current Red Angus Bulls
NDSU Dickinson Research Extension Center

	2016
Birth weight	-1.7 pounds
Weaning weight	61 pounds
Yearling weight	94 pounds
Milk	20 pounds
Marbling score	.52
Rib-eye area	.32 square inch
Herd Builder Index	106
Grid Master Index	50

EPD Benchmarks for Current Red Angus Bulls at NDSU Dickinson Research Extension Center

The same is true when selecting bulls for your herd. The first step in smart bull selection begins with a historical understanding of the bulls. A review of the last two or three calf crops provides the basis for an account of calves marketed. Either a simple or detailed review, based on the individual producer's desire, is a practical approach that helps with bull selection. Only add the details you actually are

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 Obtaining Historical Benchmarks (2016-12-15) Knowing the herd's genetic benchmarks is critical. FULL STORY

Prairie Fare: Prairie Fare: Set Holiday Foods on a Smaller Table This Year (2016-12-15) Here are 10 tips to help you avoid weight gain during the holidays. FULL STORY

Small-business Savvy: Small-business Savvy: Effective Marketing (2016-12-15) Knowing your audience can help determine the marketing methods you use. FULL STORY

going to review, understand and use.

Were you happy with the calves? If the answer is yes, open the door to better understand the genetics that produced those calves, which is available by better understanding the sires of the calves. While the cows are important, today I want to focus on the sires. With the registration numbers in hand, the data are accessible through the breed associations.

The Dickinson Research Extension Center utilizes several breeds of cattle. For this discussion (which is the same for all breeds), I'll use the Red Angus bulls. The registration numbers of the center's Red Angus sires are 1700517, 1700534, 1700525, 1617805, 1617778, 1724745, 1724751, 1724651, 1691764, 1717588, 3473741, 3473800 and 3473777.

So, where are registration numbers? While individual animal identification is not used throughout the cattle industry, registration numbers are available throughout the purebred business. Those numbers, the individual registration numbers of cattle, are critical and are the heart of the breed association.

Did you know that for some breeds, you simply can start registering cattle? By doing so, a producer starts to build a genetic database. But you do not need to start from scratch because the herd bulls already should be registered with the appropriate

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breed association.

Am I being overly enthusiastic? No, because those genetics are accessed through the registration numbers of cattle that are registered in the various breed associations. At recent bull-buying workshops for individual producers, producers were asked to develop baseline or benchmark values for production traits of previous bulls utilized in the herd.

Too often, the stumbling block is the lack of a registration number limiting access to the database that contains the bull's information. When buying registered bulls, always, always, always, always insist on transferring the registration number to your operation. If the bull or bulls are from registered parents, always insist the bull be registered and transferred to you. Do not say, "Well, the bull only will be used on commercial cows, so I do not need the bull registered." That is wrong, wrong and wrong.

Sorry for the rant. Getting back on track, the center's 13 Red Angus bulls can be looked up, utilizing the Red Angus Breed Association website (http://redangus.org/).

For example, bull 1691764, born March 31, 2014, was purchased as a yearling based on the growth potential demonstrated by the bull's expected progeny differences (EPDs). Bull 1691764's EPDs for the six major traits the center tracks are as

follows: birth weight, 1.8 pounds; weaning weight, 75 pounds; yearling weight, 117 pounds; milk, 26 pounds; marbling score, .69; and rib-eye area, .54 square inch.

Bull 1691764 is a growth and carcass bull. The Red Angus Association also provides the Herd Builder and Grid Master indexes. Bull 1691764 has a Herd Builder Index of 101 and Grid Master Index of 51. These indexes will be discussed in a future BeefTalk.

While other individual traits are available, let's keep it simple and focus on the six individual traits already mentioned. Bull 1691764 is just one of the pen of 13 bulls, so let's assume all the 13 bulls had an equal opportunity to mate with the cows.

An average of the values of all the bulls' EPDs provides a better genetic benchmark for the center. In this case, the 13 bulls were averaged, and the average value for each EPD trait is as follows: birth weight at minus 1.7 pounds, weaning weight at 61 pounds, yearling weight at 94 pounds, milk at 20 pounds, marbling score at .52 and rib-eye area at .32 square inch.

Assuming you like the calves you have, then you also know the average EPD values that produced those calves. Now, as a producer, you have a benchmark to start the selection of new bulls.

Remember the pen of calves? What do you like? What don't you like? Select the bulls that will bend

the averages in the direction of the desired change. When bull selection is based on the herd's historic numbers that make up the herd's genetic benchmarks, progress is made in the long term.

As individual bulls are purchased, each bull's EPD values should maintain the average benchmark genetic values or change in a direction the producer wants to go. Knowing the herd's genetic benchmarks is critical.

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.

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Attachments

PDF - EPD Benchmarks for Current Red Angus Bulls at NDSU Dickinson Research Extension Center

(NDSU_Extension_Service_BeefTalk_121516.pdf -

20.43 Kb)

[EPS - EPD Benchmarks for Current Red Angus Bulls at NDSU Dickinson Research Extension Center](#)
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