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BeefTalk: Step 1 for Buying a Bull: Find the Base Herd EPD Values



The bull's EPD values are the best representation of who he is.

By Kris Ringwall, Beef Specialist

NDSU Extension Service

The first step when buying a new bull is to access the traits of the old bulls. Breeding programs tend to be long term, and the current herd is a product of the old bulls.

Let's not get hung up on numbers. Instead, let's ask and answer some questions. As a herd manager, are you satisfied with the output of the herd? Do you enjoy the cattle? Are the calves the type you want to produce? Is there a demand for the calves? What does the market say about the calves?

This does not need to be a complicated process. As

Images

Bull Buying

Find the Base Herd EPD Values
The gene pool of any herd is the genes that were introduced based on the bulls that were used.

Bull Buying: Find the Base Herd EPD Values

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you review the herd, do you smile or wish for a better herd? When the neighbor comes over, are there cows you do not want seen or is the whole herd open for public viewing? When the calves are sold, do they sell as one or do you partition some off into smaller lots? Do you slip some thorough to the off days at the market?

Satisfaction with the present is the goal of yesterday's bull buying. There are lots of ways to measure production, but the key to satisfaction rests in the heart of the producer. If you are satisfied, try to buy bulls of a similar genetic makeup as before. If you are not satisfied, then define the bulls that previously were purchased and head in a different direction.

Remember that commercial producers buy bulls, and it is those bulls that are the focus of imported genetics within the herd. One half of the genetic material in the cow herd will trace directly to the bulls that sired the cows.

That genetic material is the expected progeny difference (EPD) values of the purchased bulls. An individual calf receives half of its genes (bull EPD values) from the sire and, on average, one-fourth of the remaining genes come from the EPD values of the maternal grandsire and one-fourth comes from the maternal granddam.

For the average calf, the sire and the maternal grandsire are projected to have contributed three-

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fourths of the calves' genes. Although somewhat challenging to do all the math, on average, if one goes back an additional generation, 87.5 percent of the genes within the calf crop are potentially accounted for by the EPD values of the last three sets of bulls that the producer purchased.

One should notice the inclusion of the term EPD within the previous discussion. The bull's EPD values are the best representation of who he is. The best evaluation of current and past bulls is to look up their EPD values. That process is not difficult, provided one has maintained the registration numbers of the bulls.

The biggest mistake purebred or commercial producers make when buying bulls is not having the bull registrations transferred to their name. That is a serious mistake. All registered bulls should be transferred to their new owner. Breed associations constantly are updating their databases and fine-tuning the EPDs for all bulls, especially with the genomic opportunities available to enhance genetic evaluations. As your bull ages on your place, his data is growing at breed headquarters. In time, a producer can print the revised EPDs to better evaluate selection objectives and progress by reviewing past bull purchases, along with new purchases.

Thus the point for today: After acknowledging your level of satisfaction with the herd but before doing anything else, find out what bulls created the

current herd. Find a spreadsheet or simple piece of paper and list the current bulls by registration number and then go to the appropriate breed association website and look up selected EPD values for those bulls.

The simplest is to utilize what one might call the “touchy, feely traits.” In other words, those traits one understands.

At the Dickinson Research Extension Center, I like to use four baseline traits because they are simple growth traits. The four traits are EPDs for birth weight, weaning weight, yearling weight and rib-eye area.

In addition, I usually list the milk and marbling EPDs as tag-along traits because they have a huge impact within the genetics of the beef business.

A producer can pick any trait or index to include on the evaluation sheet for past bulls. However, do not make the process too complicated because too many numbers written on a page cloud the mind.

The point is to list the traits and average the values for past bulls. That average EPD value for each trait drives the current performance of the herd. Now you know why the herd is what it is.

EPDs are the tools used to determine if you want to stay the course or change the herd. You decide.

May you find all your ear tags.

For more information, contact Ringwall at 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to

<http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/news/columns/beeftalk/>.

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Attachments



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[EPD Values](#) 

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