

## **BeefTalk 592: Let's Buy a Bull**

*Reinvesting in the bull pen is pivotal to the success of a beef operation.*

Bull sales are well under way. For those getting ready to buy bulls for the upcoming breeding season, the data available to make buying decisions has not changed a lot.

However, even though this data has been around for decades and the general concepts are solid and very refined, producers need to do their homework prior to attending a bull sale to purchase bulls that will meet their desired outcome. Unfortunately, that may mean attending several bull sales until there is agreement on the desired bulls and the amount of cash on hand.

A change this year is that producers probably need to add \$1,000-plus to their base bids. Bulls are getting more expensive and so are the calves they produce.

Reinvesting in the bull pen is pivotal to the success of a beef operation. Granted, the cow herd is very important as well, but the routine addition of new genetics comes from the bulls, which usually are purchased.

Each year, the Dickinson Research Extension Center adds bulls to the pen as others are culled. The routine is fairly similar each year.

Recently, the center went bull shopping. The process always starts the same. A bull sale catalog is obtained ahead of time and the bulls are reviewed against the breed expected progeny differences (EPDs) for the desired traits.

In this case, it was a Red Angus sale and the producer was kind enough to provide the EPD averages and ranges in the catalog for calves less than 2 years old. Those values are readily available from all mainline breed associations and are critical in establishing a starting point when shopping for bulls.

The center was looking for bulls that could service moderate-sized cows calving on grass. Traits of interest included calving ease, growth and carcass. The Red Angus Association provides values for calving ease direct, birth weight, weaning weight, yearling weight, calf weight as a result of milk production and calf weight as a result of total maternal influence.

These traits are very useful for cow-calf producers who sell calves off the cow. Because the center maintains all the calves through the feedlot and sells the calves on the rail, EPDs for marbling, yield grade, carcass weight, rib-eye area and back fat also are evaluated for each bull. Also provided are the EPD values for mature cow maintenance energy, heifer pregnancy and maternal calving ease.

However, in the world of EPDs, the center, not unlike other producers, has to prioritize the traits of interest and select bulls based on the primary traits needed. Once the initial list of bulls is compiled, the bulls can be removed based on secondary traits of interest. In addition, the actual performance and physical measurements of the bulls are provided and crosschecked with the Red Angus Association's estimates of genetic value for each bull. Bulls that fail to meet acceptable values for performance or physical measurements or are structurally questionable are passed by.

Many times, the pocketbook is empty before the bulls that are desired are declared sold by the auctioneer. If one really needs to buy a bull, the purchase list needs to have several bulls on it in hopes that some will be affordable. The lists were compiled from information obtained from the bull sale catalog and Web information prior to seeing the bulls.

At least for this sale, the end result was that 43 bulls were passed by for various reasons. This left the center with 18 bulls on the primary review list and nine bulls on the secondary list. Upon arrival at the bull pens, the list was cut to six bulls.

The center hoped to buy two bulls as they slowly walked through the ring. Five bulls exceeded the center's preset maximum bid, but one bull was coming back to the center priced at \$3,750.

## **NDSU Dickinson Research Extension Center's New Red Angus Bull by the Numbers**

Trait Breed ranking	(upper)
Weaning Weight	17%
Yearling Weight	7%
Marbling	16%
Rib Eye Area	3%
Calving Ease Direct	42%
Birth Weight	81%
Milk	49%
Total Maternal	20%
Maintenance Energy	15%
Heifer Pregnancy	28%
Maternal Calving Ease	20%
Stayability	18%

The percentages were good. The bull ranked in the upper 17 percent of the Red Angus breed for weaning weight, upper 7 percent for yearling weight, upper 16 percent for marbling and upper 3 percent for rib-eye area.

However, the bull was not the center's top pick because his EPD for calving ease direct was 5 (upper 42 percent) and for birth weight was 1.5 (upper 81 percent). These numbers mean that we will put him with some of the center's larger-framed cows and the search will continue for a bull for the moderate-framed cows.

The bull also ranked above average in milk (49 percent), total maternal (20 percent), mature cow maintenance energy (15 percent), heifer pregnancy (28 percent), maternal calving ease (20 percent) and stayability (18 percent).

Mission accomplished.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at <http://www.BeefTalk.com>.

For more information, contact the NDBCIA Office, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to <http://www.CHAPS2000.com> on the Internet.