

COMMON GROUND

Compare apples to apples



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For data-driven cattlemen, expected progeny differences (EPDs) have become a go-to resource to help guide decisions when investing in genetics for their herd. Today's markets mean the more you are able to focus on finding the right bulls that have predictable results, the better you can manage your business, which ultimately leads to more profitability.

For years Angus breeders have tracked pedigrees and turned in weights, records and, more recently, DNA samples at an industry-leading pace. Today, with more than 27 million phenotypes and 690,000 genotypes, the EPDs produced on registered Angus seedstock are backed by a powerful and unmatched beef cattle database.

While these EPDs are an incredibly important tool to compare individual animals, they can only be used to compare within the Angus breed.

Directly comparing an Angus EPD to an EPD on an animal of a different breed is like comparing apples to oranges.

As you look for your next herd bull, armed with sale books from a number of breeds, please keep in mind there are ways to compare breed to breed. Scientists at the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center (USMARC) have researched breed differences for years in their breeding program and built across-breed EPD adjustments.

These adjustments, in my opinion, are a very underused tool in the beef industry. Using these simple adjustments, cattlemen can take EPDs from other breeds and put them on an Angus base for comparison. The table below displays the trait adjustments for the major beef breeds. Since not all breeds publish the same EPDs, only the primary weight and carcass measures are included.

Breed	Birth wt.	Weaning wt.	Yearling wt.	Milk	Marbling	Ribeye area	Backfat	Carcass wt.
Angus	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hereford	+1.4	-17	-44	-13	-0.30	0.02	-0.07	-72
Red Angus	+2.6	-19	-31	2	-0.03	0.25	-0.04	-17
Charolais	+6.6	+33	+23	8	-0.29	0.79	-0.20	8
Gelbvieh	+2.9	-16	-27	8	-0.37	0.66	-0.07	-20
Limousin	+2.5	-17	-54	-2	-0.03	0.59	-0.02	-22
Simmental	+2.8	-12	-19	2	-0.12	0.82	-0.05	-3

Using the table is simple. To compare an Angus birth weight (BW) EPD to a Hereford birth weight EPD, you add 1.4 to the Hereford EPD. To compare an Angus yearling weight (YW) EPD to a Red Angus yearling weight EPD, you subtract 31 from the Red Angus EPD.

Where I tend to see these adjustments most needed is comparing bulls for calving ease. Angus has both a calving ease direct (CED) and a calving ease maternal (CEM) EPD that are more comprehensive than just looking at the BW EPD, but since not all breeds have the same EPDs, only an adjustment for BW EPD exists.

Most cattlemen have considered their cow herd, their past dystocia issues, and their labor at calving time to establish an EPD level that best defines a "heifer bull" for their operation. That threshold varies across regions and operations, but many would say an Angus BW EPD of +2.5 is the cutoff on heifers. A Charolais bull with a -2.3 BW EPD would be in the top 10% of that breed, and may first appear to easily clear the threshold. But using the across-breed adjustments, 6.6 is added to the -2.3 for an Angus-equivalent EPD of a +4.3. That still may be acceptable for your outfit, but you now are able to make a more informed decision.

An updated research paper with new adjustment factors is set to be released by USMARC at the beginning of 2020. Watch for that release or visit the [angus.org](http://www.angus.org) website for the most recent data. The direct link is <https://www.angus.org/Nce/AcrossBreedEpdAdjFactors.aspx>. |

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