Sorting Gate

Draft your best lineup.

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We are gearing up to watch one of the biggest sporting events of the year — the Super Bowl. Preparation for this game started long before the season began. Long before the preseason, or even start of practice, big decisions were made in the NFL draft. These draft picks can have huge ramifications on the outcome of the season and who we will see take home the Lombardi trophy in February.

Producers have important draft picks to make in coming months — bull selection picks. Your bull battery makes up 50% of your calf crop's genetics each year. Whether you're drafting sires for artificial insemination (AI) or natural service, this lineup will have huge implications to your bottom line for years.

Step by step

The first step in drafting your next lineup is to understand the strengths and weaknesses of your current bull battery and cow herd, while having a firm grasp of your goals for the future. Which bulls you should choose will depend on whether they will breed heifers or mature cows, and whether you will sell calves as feeders or retain ownership.

After understanding the holes you need to fill, use the appropriate selection criteria pertaining to physical appearance and genetic makeup to make your overall picks.

Appearances

When thinking of the physical appearance of the bull, consider his structure: Watch his gait, examine his angles, and analyze his foot conformation. Are his toes straight and symmetrical? Does he have appropriate set and flex to his pasterns? Is he straight up through his shoulder?

Answering these questions before your next bull purchase helps ensure your herd is set up for success. A bull with poor structure will not perform or last as long as expected.

Under the hide

During the drafting process, many stats and performance metrics are studied. Commercial cattlemen looking to select a registered Angus bull can be provided a full workup before making their picks.

The Association publishes 22 expected progeny differences (EPD) and nine different dollar value indexes ($Values) to aid producers in making decisions. A full list and brief explanation of these EPDs are in Fig. 1.

Using EPDs and $Values alongside sound visual appraisal aids in the selection process. Whether one is searching to lower the rates of calving dystocia or to capitalize on carcass quality traits to gain premiums on sale day, accurate and predictable genetics add value for any breeding objective.

Fig. 1: Descriptions of EPDs provided by the American Angus Association

EPD	Trait	Unit of measure	Animals in the top 1% of the breed would equate to …
CED	Calving ease direct	%	More unassisted births
BW	Birth weight	Pounds	Lighter birth weights
WW	Weaning weight	Pounds	Heavier weaning weights
YW	Yearling weight	Pounds	Heavier yearling weights
RADG	Residual average daily gain	Pounds	Greater feed efficiency
DMI	Dry-matter intake	Pounds	Less feed consumed per day
YH	Yearling height	Inches	More height at a year of age
SC	Scrotal circumference	Centimeters	Larger scrotal size at yearling time
HP	Heifer pregnancy	%	Higher probability heifers settle in first breeding year
CEM	Calving ease maternal	%	More unassisted births
Milk	Maternal milk	Pounds	Heavier calf weaning weight due to mothering ability
MW	Mature weight	Pounds	Heavier mature females
MH	Mature height	Inches	Taller mature females
DOC	Docility	%	More docile progeny at yearling age
Claw	Claw set	Foot score unit	More desirable toe structure
Angle	Foot angle	Foot score unit	More desirable angle to the pastern
PAP	Pulmonary arterial pressure	Millimeters of Mercury (mmHG)	Less susceptible to high altitude/brisket disease for cattle grazing at elevations > 5,000 ft.
HS	Hair shed	Hair shed score	Increased heat and fescue tolerance due to early summer hair shedding
CW	Carcass weight	Pounds	Heavier carcass weights at harvest
Marb	Marbling	Marbling score	Higher USDA marbling scores
RE	Ribeye area	Square inches	Larger ribeye areas
Fat	Fat thickness	Inches	Less fat at 12th rib

With the Angus database including more than 80 million performance measures and 1 million genotypes, beef producers won't find a more well-rounded, predictable set of genetic tools.

DNA-profiling bulls increases the accuracy of the EPD predictions to ensure the best decisions are made. Accuracy values range from 0 to 1; only highly proven AI sires that have thousands of progeny recorded in the Association's herd book reach accuracies close to 1. However, many bull suppliers capture as much information as they can on a young bull prior to sale time. Each bit of information collected helps to improve the accuracy of EPD predictions.

Finally, before turning a bull out to pasture, sign him up for a breeding soundness exam (sometimes referred to as a BSE) with a veterinarian. This type of exam helps to measure the potential sexual performance of a bull. If a bull cannot pass a breeding soundness exam, it may be time to cull him from the herd because he will not settle his share of cows.

A trusted source

Find a seedstock producer you can rely on to help aid you in the decision-making process. Angus producers utilize these tools every single day to make breeding and management decisions. Use their knowledge to better understand what the tools mean and how they can be useful to you.

Remember, knowing where you are and which holes you need to fill in your lineup simplifies the drafting process, which will help ensure a winning calf crop. ABB