

Selecting leading ladies for your herd



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I can still picture her rounding the corner and going through the gate. It was the moment I knew she was the heifer I wanted to show that summer. She had the look. More monumental, it was really the moment I chose to have my own cow herd — the moment I chose my first leading lady.

You may snicker and say “a look” isn’t much to base a cow herd on, but there wasn’t a lot else in 1977, and I was 12. She was the first heifer calf out of our new herd sire, so we didn’t have much experience with the pedigree. We had birth and weaning weights, but we didn’t have a battery of expected progeny differences (EPDs). The American Angus Association wouldn’t publish its first *Sire Evaluation Report* for another three years.

More solid choices

As you pick your replacement heifers, you’re not picking a show heifer. You’re setting your revenue base for years to come. That female you hope to keep in the herd for seven to 10 years will supply half the genetics of every calf she bears during her lifetime. No matter what bull you breed her to, she will set the bar.

The Association has equipped us with better tools to select our leading ladies today. Kelli Retallick-Riley, president of Angus Genetics Inc. (AGI), shares insights on why Angus have a maternal advantage and tools available for selection in “Sorting Gate” (see page 50). She shares nine EPDs directly related to maternal function and lifetime adaptability.

While EPDs can help direct selection of registered females and the bulls you use to sire replacement heifers, Oklahoma cattleman Jimmy Taylor relies on GeneMax® Advantage™ scores to select his replacement females and to make mating decisions (see “Selecting for the End Goal,” page 56). Seeing numbers match cutout data from steer mates gives him confidence in the technology.

Once selected, developing females into productive cows is a critical step to herd profitability. It doesn’t come cheap with corn prices near \$7 per bushel and pasture rent at \$40-\$45 per acre per year here in Missouri.

Experts in this issue explain that each female needs to have at least five, and maybe six, calves just to cover her cost of development (see “Considerations for Keeping Replacements,” page 60). You might earn a return with that sixth or seventh calf. Veterinarian Brad White shares tips for developing replacement heifers for longevity in “Health & Husbandry,” beginning on page 38.

Limited feedstuffs can force hard decisions on what to do with that cow herd base. Dan Shike shares some perspective from a nutrition standpoint in “The Digestive Tract” (see page 46).

On the other hand, those with ample feedstuffs may have held back a few extra heifers to sell with anticipated marketing opportunities. Becky Mills shares experiences of commercial bred heifer sales in “Do-It-Yourself Heifer Sales” (see page 124). I’d be remiss if I didn’t share that Angus Media has a whole staff, beginning with your regional manager (see page 155), who can help in that department. If you’re on the other side of the fence and looking for heifers, they can help, as well.

A good eye

As Troy Marshall points out in his commentary on page 114, beauty is in the eye of the beholder when it comes to the ideal cow to suit your particular situation.

My first choice for a leading lady didn’t turn out too bad. Black Majesty and I brought home quite a few trophies, and Baby Doll — the heifer Mom and Dad chose for me — caught a reserve or two. We bred Black Majesty to a popular young artificial insemination (AI) sire. He died in a freak accident before she calved, so that first calf — a bull — grabbed attention from all over the state because semen stores were limited on his sire. We had people visiting the farm the week he was born to measure his cannon bone to predict how big he’d be. I got to show him, too, and selling an interest in him helped put me through college and earn the degree that lets me write about the benefits of better selection tools. God definitely has a plan. |

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