Beef Talk
Buying the right bull means checking his grades

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The commonsense process of buying bulls has not changed much. The requirements are simple. The bull needs four decent legs, a bit of appropriate muscle indicative of the product and a functioning reproductive system.

Cost usually determines which bull one brings home. The opportunity to buy a bull that offers a greater probability of producing profit-generating progeny is available, and the evaluation process is simple.

Producer evaluation needs to focus on phenotype (what a bull looks like) and genotype (the genes a bull will pass to his progeny). What one sees is not what one always gets.

The process involves the identification of measurable traits relevant to beef production, which are traits that are indicative of profitable

Table 1: Spring 2009 EPD and $Value percentile breakdowns for non-parent bulls

NON-PARENT BULLS

TOP PCT	Production						Maternal			Carcass				$Values					
	CED	BW	WW	YW	YH	SC	CEM	Milk	$EN	CW	Marb	RE	Fat	$W	$F	$G	$QG	$YG	$B
1%	+14	-1.9	+63	+111	+1.0	+1.69	+12	+31	+21.70	+28	+.84	+.59	-.037	+33.45	+47.24	+37.84	+31.44	+10.96	+65.20
2%	+13	-1.4	+60	+108	+.9	+1.51	+11	+30	+19.00	+26	+.77	+.53	-.030	+32.40	+44.11	+36.38	+30.15	+10.15	+62.55
3%	+12	-1.1	+59	+105	+.9	+1.40	+11	+29	+17.40	+24	+.72	+.50	-.026	+31.75	+42.28	+35.38	+29.40	+9.64	+60.69
4%	+12	-.8	+58	+104	+.8	+1.33	+11	+29	+16.25	+23	+.69	+.47	-.023	+31.27	+40.89	+34.58	+28.68	+9.32	+59.13
5%	+11	-.6	+57	+102	+.8	+1.26	+11	+28	+15.26	+23	+.66	+.45	-.021	+30.90	+39.85	+33.86	+27.98	+9.14	+57.78
10%	+10	+.1	+54	+97	+.7	+1.05	+10	+27	+12.29	+20	+.57	+.38	-.014	+29.56	+36.05	+31.29	+25.60	+8.12	+53.30
15%	+9	+.5	+52	+94	+.6	+.92	+9	+26	+10.29	+18	+.51	+.33	-.009	+28.63	+33.56	+29.40	+24.20	+7.47	+50.24
20%	+9	+.8	+51	+92	+.5	+.81	+9	+25	+8.79	+17	+.47	+.29	-.005	+27.88	+31.71	+27.78	+22.95	+7.02	+47.94
25%	+8	+1.1	+49	+90	+.5	+.72	+8	+24	+7.59	+15	+.43	+.26	-.002	+27.23	+29.99	+26.41	+21.69	+6.53	+46.05
30%	+7	+1.4	+48	+88	+.4	+.64	+8	+23	+6.43	+14	+.39	+.23	+.001	+26.65	+28.55	+25.16	+20.60	+6.13	+44.35
35%	+7	+1.6	+47	+86	+.4	+.57	+8	+23	+5.46	+13	+.36	+.20	+.003	+26.09	+27.18	+23.99	+19.62	+5.73	+42.79
40%	+6	+1.8	+46	+84	+.4	+.50	+7	+22	+4.48	+12	+.33	+.18	+.006	+25.56	+25.82	+22.89	+18.48	+5.35	+41.33
45%	+6	+2.0	+45	+83	+.3	+.44	+7	+21	+3.52	+11	+.31	+.15	+.008	+25.04	+24.56	+21.83	+17.41	+4.92	+39.94
50%	+5	+2.2	+44	+81	+.3	+.37	+7	+21	+2.64	+10	+.28	+.13	+.010	+24.51	+23.27	+20.77	+16.64	+4.60	+38.57
55%	+5	+2.4	+43	+79	+.2	+.31	+6	+20	+1.80	+9	+.25	+.11	+.013	+24.01	+22.03	+19.73	+15.84	+4.26	+37.19
60%	+4	+2.6	+42	+78	+.2	+.24	+6	+20	+.89	+8	+.23	+.09	+.015	+23.47	+20.70	+18.69	+14.59	+3.75	+35.80
65%	+4	+2.8	+41	+76	+.2	+.17	+6	+19	-.06	+7	+.20	+.06	+.017	+22.91	+19.32	+17.61	+13.80	+3.36	+34.35
70%	+3	+3.1	+40	+74	+.1	+.10	+5	+18	-1.12	+6	+.18	+.04	+.020	+22.30	+17.86	+16.49	+12.49	+2.90	+32.87
75%	+3	+3.3	+38	+72	+.1	+.02	+5	+17	-2.07	+5	+.15	+.01	+.023	+21.63	+16.29	+15.30	+11.67	+2.32	+31.29
80%	+2	+3.6	+37	+69	+.0	-.06	+4	+16	-3.30	+4	+.12	-.02	+.026	+20.87	+14.43	+14.03	+10.49	+1.73	+29.44
85%	+1	+3.9	+35	+66	+.0	-.16	+4	+15	-4.56	+3	+.09	-.05	+.030	+19.95	+12.32	+12.57	+9.07	+.90	+27.27
90%	+0	+4.3	+33	+63	-.1	-.28	+3	+14	-6.20	+1	+.05	-.09	+.035	+18.75	+9.56	+10.80	+7.82	-.09	+24.49
95%	-1	+4.9	+29	+57	-.2	-.47	+2	+12	-8.64	-2	+.00	-.15	+.044	+16.91	+5.28	+8.17	+5.40	-1.86	+20.41
100%	-23	+10.9	-4	-9	-1.5	-2.51	-16	-9	-25.12	-34	-.43	-.58	+.133	-5.03	-34.93	-14.33	-15.77	-26.82	-16.41
Total animals	127,084	132,958	132,958	132,958	19,984	42,809	127,084	132,958	145,096	70,131	70,131	70,131	70,131	145,096	145,096	104,826	104,826	104,826	104,826
Avg. EPD	+5	+2.2	+44	+80	+.3	+.38	+6	+21	+2.89	+10	+.30	+.14	+.011	+24.30	+23.00	+20.86	+16.61	+4.25	+38.70

Source: *Spring 2009 Sire Evaluation Report* published by the American Angus Association. For percentile breakdowns of current sires, current dams and non-parent cows, as well as other summary information and an online sire search, visit *www.angussiresearch.com*.

beef production. The secret is hidden in the traits.

Put them to the test

In school, student learning is measured by appropriate evaluations (tests). The same is true of measuring production traits.

There are different thoughts on how to evaluate students. Yet, students are evaluated, and their future careers guided by their individual interests, desires and abilities.

In the beef business, producers need to accept the fact that bulls need to be evaluated. The test results will help understand the future role of the bull.

Perhaps it is not fair to compare bull evaluations with student evaluations, but it does make for an easy comparison. As most of us have participated in parent-teacher conferences, through time we come to understand that certain grades are indicative of a better understanding of a particular subject than others.

If our student is getting 90% of the questions right, the student could receive a high B or A for the course. If we visit during the conference and the student is getting only 40% of the answers right, the student may receive a D or F.

We understand that more effort or guidance may need to be involved with the growth and development of the student. We do not always like what we hear, but we move on, make decisions, and continue to guide and direct.

Now let us take that concept and apply it to what we have available to utilize in the evaluation of bulls. Breed associations publish the evaluations of all purebred bulls for appropriate traits that are indicative of performance and associated with the genes that will be passed on by the bull to his offspring.

These publications are called sire summaries and contain a tremendous amount of data. Actually, the publications probably contain more data than many producers want to see, but the data is there.

Not unlike grading scales that are used in our own educational processes, a producer actually can go and look up how a bull did on his evaluation. Is the bull in the top 1% of the class or the top 50%?

Does the data in the sire summary show the bull in the bottom half percentile? The point is, if one opens up the evaluations and finds the charts that generally are labeled "percentiles" or "percentile breakdowns" or something to that effect, the bull's

score, or EPD (expected progeny difference), can be compared with other bulls within the breed.

Class rank

Use of this data will help producers make an informed decision. Is the bull the one you want, and are the evaluations of the bull's traits where they should be?

Numbers work and the producer should compare managerial and production expectations with the evaluations of the bull's performance. If one needs high growth, why not look for bulls that rank high in their weaning weight EPD or yearling weight EPD?

Select the percentile ranking one wants to deal with and then go find the bulls with the right EPDs. There are many bulls, but, as a producer, one does not need to be poorly informed.

Check those evaluations.

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