



Your Link to

by **AL KOBER**, CAB retail director



EPD concept fits both sides

You all know that EPD stands for “expected progeny difference.” It’s one of the tools you use to predict characteristics of the next generation of cattle. Other factors come into play, but a high-accuracy EPD stands out. You have confidence about what you will get because you know what’s going into it.

Obviously, you don’t pick a bull on looks alone, any more than you would buy a car without researching what’s under the hood and how it has performed for others.

Let’s pretend — and I know it’s a stretch — I am asked to go to a sale and purchase a bull for your ranch. As an inexperienced, uneducated shopper, many of the bulls look about the same to me. Any number of them look like they could do the job, so I need more information to bring home the one most likely to fit your herd improvement needs.

Fortunately, these are registered Angus bulls. Their documented information includes performance and pedigree history, analyzed through the world’s largest and most detailed database. And, besides the EPD credentials, there is the dollar value (\$Value) index system to guide me.

Without these, I am taking a huge risk. Without the EPDs and associated tools, I may get back to the ranch and find out later that what I paid for and what I got are two different things.

Now go to the meatcase

How do you think a customer with an untrained eye feels standing in front of a meatcase, looking at all the different

beef cuts? When they get home, and get into cooking and eating, will the beef item they paid for be very different from what they ended up with?

You can see the similarity between the uneducated, inexperienced bull buyer and the steak buyer who is similarly at a loss. The customer needs to have some science-based tools predicting the positive or negative potential eating characteristics of those packages in the meatcase.

Is there some way to know how that steak will perform before the customer buys it? We could envision a concept like “expected palatability difference.” Now, the industry may never use that acronym at both ends of the beef chain, but we’ll use it to make our comparison point.

Two steaks, just like two different bulls, look the same to a typical, untrained consumer’s eye. Back at the bull sale, both animals are big, black and polled with four sound feet and legs, two ears, two eyes and one mouth. Yep, both bulls are the same. The only difference is that one will cost more. But wait! This one is a registered Angus bull with a list of EPDs that tells us he can be expected to perform better than the other.

How about the two steaks? They are both a bright cherry red, both the same size, both are cut the same thickness, both are in a meat tray. They look the same. Only one costs a little more. But wait! One of them has a label of some



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kind, a colored logo. Can this help? It says “*Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®).” What does this mean?

It means that steak is backed by 10 science-based specifications that accurately predict how it will perform. There’s an analogy to EPDs, but in this case the expected palatability difference clearly favors the known, the CAB steak, with strongly positive numbers. It is like choosing a highly qualified, registered bull over commercial alternatives that are not backed by EPDs.

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What makes registered Angus bulls from your program worth more than those from another? You certainly can’t rely on deception or, as the cliché goes, “smoke and mirrors.” It’s the same with beef consumers.

Real-world experience

Recently, the meat director for a small CAB-licensed retail chain in the Midwest was convinced that he could sell more beef and make more money by switching to a local non-CAB program. He made the switch and waited for good things to happen.

What happened probably surprised him. Several months later, we found he was no longer with that company — and the new meat director wanted to know what he could do to regain the beef business the company had lost.

He asked his meat managers and store managers what to do. Smart man. They asked their customers, who said, “Go back to the brand we could depend on. Return to CAB.” That’s just what the new director did, and now his sales and profits are better than ever.

In another case, one of the companies that was historically a CAB “Top 10” customer was sold. The new buyer had been very successful selling lower-quality beef at lower prices, in a different market. He tried to bring that concept to his new chain of stores, running an ad with no CAB.

The prices were lower but the quality of the beef was lower and the consumers knew the difference. It was a disaster. Customers were complaining, store managers were complaining, meat managers were complaining, and beef sales dropped off the charts. Needless to say, this chain learned the hard way and made its way once again to the CAB top 10 retailer list, doing even better than before.

The bull buyer and the steak buyer have much in common. They are preparing to invest some money and they want the results to equal or exceed their expectations. Customers don’t know all the 10 CAB specifications. If asked, they do not really care.

What they do want from the beef they buy is “an enjoyable eating experience, one bite at a time, every time.” Consumers who have had the opportunity to try it know that CAB delivers that level of flavor, tenderness and juiciness.

High-quality beef that meets all 10 CAB specifications does not happen by chance. It takes hard work, lots of time and money with special attention to details. We start with bulls and cows with the expected progeny differences to give us confidence that many of the progeny will produce high-quality beef that meets all the 10 CAB specifications.

We end with happy consumers who will pay more for CAB and gladly buy it again, thus adding value to your registered Angus cattle. All because the products they buy have what it would take to hit the top 8% for positive expected palatability differences.

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