

AI Trends

Seven commercial producer trends for AI.

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Trending isn't just something that is popular on Twitter. Sometimes it is helpful to step back and look at the patterns that emerge in an industry, and with something as scientific as artificial insemination (AI), it is important to gauge current uses before new advancements are developed. Obviously, many producers choose bulls that fit their specific needs, but here are the top seven trends that representatives from three AI companies have seen recently.



1. Calving ease

Calving ease is the most important trait that customers look for, said Luke Bowman at Select Sires, and Jack Ganje at Universal Semen Sales Inc. agrees. Ganje said that most of his customers AI first-calf heifers,

so it is incredibly important that the bulls they choose are easy-calving. Maternal traits are very important in bulls for commercial producers, too. Commercial producers don't want to have to nurse a cow through a difficult birth because they chose a bull with poor maternal traits.



2. Synchronization

Synchronized estrus is becoming ever more popular in commercial herds, says Adam Noble of ABS Global.

Bowman said that timed AI makes breeding easier and conception rates can be good if it is used correctly. He explained that a producer has 10-14 days to get all of the cows through the chute to synchronize estrus.

The advantage is that even though it is a lot of work, it is done in a short amount of time, especially compared to having to sort one cow out at a time if checking heat naturally. He added that it allows producers to

breed within a 12-hour window, whether the producers have seen the cows in heat or not.

Ganje said that 100% of his customers use timed AI during April, May and early June. Universal Semen Sales will send their customers a timed schedule, so it is simple to do and is very effective. He noted that many producers turn in a bull the day after they use timed breeding, and they end up with 90% of their cows bred.

Ganje explained the difference between conception and pregnancy rates between timed AI and AI on heat detection. If producer A timed-AIed 100 head of cows, and 60 become pregnant that day, he or she has a 60% conception rate and a 60% pregnancy rate (60 pregnant ÷ 100 cows bred = 0.60). If producer B heat-checks 100 cows, notices 80 of them in heat and consequently breeds those 80, with a conception rate of 75%, it still ultimately gives producer B a pregnancy rate of 60% (80 cows bred x 75% conception = 60 cows pregnant). Producers A and

B have the same pregnancy rate, but producer A got the cows bred in one day, and producer B had to check heat for 21 days.

He added that many of his customers are also farmers, and they enjoy an added benefit of timed AI — it gives them more time to farm without having to stop to check for heat two or three times a day.



3. Proven bulls

Noble said that most of his customers in western Colorado are more interested in highly proven genetics with a higher accuracy. He mentioned that he has found that seedstock producers will try more new sires, but commercial producers want proven genetics.

Generally, proven means that a bull has a much higher accuracy in his expected progeny differences (EPDs) due to a higher number of progeny, but each AI company's definition of proven is a bit different.



Bowman said that at Select Sires, a bull reaches proven status when he reaches a 0.85 accuracy in birth weight (BW). This means that there are enough of a bull's progeny in the database to prove that the BW EPD trait can be trusted. He said that they use BW as the factor because it is so important, but that means proven bulls for them might not be proven in weaning weight, or that all bulls might not reach proven status.

He gave the example that GAR Predestined is popular with both commercial and seedstock producers — he is a rare bull that has a 0.85 accuracy and is in the top 1% in both weaned calf value (\$W) and beef value (\$B), while still having a high cow energy value (\$EN). While GAR Predestined's son, GAR Progress, is showing similar phenotypic and genotypic characteristics, Bowman said that he's not as popular as his sire yet because he's not proven.

Ganje agreed that GAR Predestined is a popular bull, especially because he has a great number of progeny on the ground. "Nothing beats progeny proof," Ganje says, "Nothing beats having 2,000 calves that you can see what they look like."



4. Docility

Bowman added that docility is the No. 2 trait that his customers look for. The docility EPD is relatively new, and more producers are starting to pay attention and use it as a selection tool.



5. Angus bulls

"Angus, by far, grasps, utilizes and appreciates AI more than any other breed," says Bowman.

Noble and Ganje both agreed that Angus bulls are used in great amounts with their commercial customers. Noble said that about 80% of the breeding he does for his customers uses Angus semen. Ganje estimated that 99% of the heifers he breeds are bred to Angus.

Due to Angus' calving ease and maternal qualities, Ganje said that Angus is the most popular choice.



6. Less extreme traits

This trend is much like Goldilocks and the three bears. Ganje indicated that many of his customers are moving away from extremes in their bull choices. He gave the example of using moderately framed bulls, getting away from the really tall, big bulls, but also staying away from the very small bulls, too.

He added that customers are looking for thickness and fleshing ability, but they don't believe that they can trust the carcass traits as much as they thought they could.

Noble said that many of his clients "are paying more attention to the whole life cycle, not just the end result," which

leads to a better combination of traits.



7. \$Values

Another relatively new addition to EPDs, \$Values are becoming more important to commercial cattlemen with Angus-based herds. \$Values are specific to

the Angus breed and are selection index tools designed to simplify genetic decisions for future calf crops. A full explanation of \$Values can be found in the "By the Numbers" column in the January 2012 *Angus Journal*, or at www.angusjournal.com.

Ganje said that many of his clientele are looking at \$B the most, followed by feedlot value (\$F). As with the example of GAR Predestined used by Bowman, \$Values are

becoming increasingly important selection tools.

All commercial producers have their own selection traits and methods of breeding that suit their individual needs, but it is important to know what trends are being used so you can always stay ahead of the eight ball.



