

Beef Talk: All I want for next year is two new bulls

by **KRIS RINGWALL**,
*beef specialist, NDSU
Extension Service*



The biggest mistake purebred or commercial producers make when buying bulls is not having the bull registrations transferred to their name. That is a serious mistake.

It goes without saying in the beef

business, but what better feeling than bringing home a couple of new bulls? All the effort in selecting new bulls comes to an end when the bulls arrive in the yard.

However, don't stop there. Granted, they are the right bulls once purchased,

no questions asked. As a producer, you purchased the bull, as well as the data that represents the bull.

In simplest terms, you purchased the right to produce calves of a desired genotype. The calves will be reflective of the genes the bull has. His DNA has those threads of life that ultimately make up who we are.

Use genes to full potential

The bull's genes were measured and presented as data at the time of sale. By utilizing that data, bulls may be sorted and selected with considerable accuracy. However, the data does not stop with the purchase of the bull. Breed associations constantly are updating their databases and fine-tuning the expected progeny differences (EPDs) for all bulls.

WARNING to All Bull Buyers:

Be sure bull ownership is transferred through the breed association after completing your purchase.

As your bull ages, his database is growing at breed headquarters. In time, a producer can print the revised EPDs to better evaluate selection objectives and progress by reviewing past and new bull purchases.

Recently, as the animal-breeding class finished at school, one of the students was challenged to more thoroughly evaluate bull purchases. Unfortunately, previous bull numbers had not been maintained, so the student did not feel it was possible to go back in time. Fortunately, the family had transferred the ownership of several previously purchased bulls.

The student was encouraged to contact the breed association to help find the EPD values on older bulls. Because the bulls had been transferred to a new owner, the association was able to supply information on current and past bulls. Some of the information went back three decades.

A review of the historic and current data made for an excellent class project and a great take-home message. Yes, bulls have changed, and the genetic trends are very telling. Therefore, for the new year, evaluate the old bulls and treat yourself to a new bull or two.

Each year's crop of calves brings with it a whole new set of bull prospects. The thoughts of newness, such as new inspirations, desire and a general feeling of letting go of the old and in with the new, are good.

Keep the registration number, but why not let go of those old bulls to open doors to new genetics?

Evaluate the bull pen

Each fall, the Dickinson Research

No one denies the cost of keeping a bull, so why not make sure you are putting the costs into good bulls and not marginal bulls?



National Junior Angus Association

Members of the National Junior Angus Association pay an annual fee of \$20, and junior privileges expire at age 21. Junior members have access to all services offered by the American Angus Association, and they receive two issues of the *Angus Journal* per year and the NJAA newsletter, *Directions*.

To apply for membership in the National Junior Angus Association, visit www.angus.org/njaa/ and download a printable application, or call 816-383-5100 to request the application.

Extension Center empties the bull pen of all those bulls that got benched. This opens up some slots for new bulls. There always is the option to carry an older bull for another year. However, breeding cows on pasture is demanding, so the bull's slight limp soon becomes a major fault in next year's breeding pastures and certainly increases the potential for new injuries and some cows not getting bred.

Granted, the expectation of having the bull for three years or longer is not out of line. However, some bulls just don't make it for several reasons, including structural difficulties or attitude changes. They may start viewing their owners as herdmates and can become dangerous.

A producer should thoroughly evaluate structure, body condition and conduct, and do an early breeding soundness exam on all of the mature bulls. Minor problems will become major problems once exposed to cycling cows.

Once the bull pen has been evaluated, make sure the keepers get extra hay that will put 150 to 300 pounds (lb.) ($\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 lb. of gain daily) on the bulls throughout the nonbreeding season. This will allow the bulls to meet their normal growth curve. This sometimes does create a challenge, because the bulls slowly become too heavy to be effective breeding bulls.

However, healthy, active bulls are the desired bulls, not the thin, underfed bulls waiting in line for survival rations. No one denies the cost of keeping a bull, so why not make sure you are putting the costs into good bulls and not marginal bulls?

What store sale books have a good section on bulls? Well, none of them, at least in the world of urban shopping. However, bull sale books almost are mandatory reading for the average bull buyer, and it won't be long before there will be a bull sale every day of the week.

Look for a couple of new bulls, but before you sell the old, make sure you get the registration number transferred and tucked away for later data evaluations.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at www.BeefTalk.com



Editor's Note: For more information, contact Ringwall at 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to www.ag.ndsu.edu/news/columns/beefstalk/. Ringwall is a North Dakota State University Extension Service livestock specialist and director of the Dickinson Research Extension Center.