

# Beef Talk: We can do better

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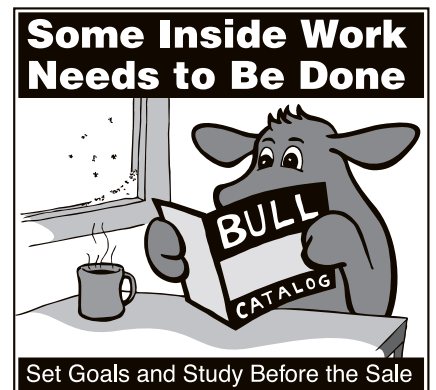
Warning: Critical statements exist in this article, so you may not want to read it. However, you should at least take home the point that acquiring good bulls through knowledgeable and informed bull selection is critical to the survival of the beef business.

Implementing focused production goals, with clear outcomes relevant to the production of beef, is critical. If in doubt, simply glance over the fence and view the competition. The poultry, swine and dairy industries routinely produce very uniform, marketable products that meet predefined

production goals utilizing the same tools that are available to the beef industry.

First, let's talk about working cattle, because it always is challenging. With the cold snap and several sets of cows needing ultrasounding for pregnancy evaluation, I got ready.

Chuteside attire certainly varies with the weather. Having prepared for the cold with layered clothing under the traditional blue coveralls, I suddenly realized my ability to put my plastic boots over the cowboy boots was in question. Reaching my feet was a challenge, but the job got done.



I was reminded that we all change. If nothing else, we get older. Our individual flexibility seems to come up short some days, but with an appropriate tweak, we get the job done. However, those tweaks only can do so much.

As an industry, our tweaking is evident. However, some days I wonder, because we can do better. Maybe one should not say that. However, the other day, while watching several sets of cattle sell at a public market, the variation that was present was notable.

The cows, bulls, yearlings and calves of all sizes and types were selling to the sound of the auction. With each swing of the door, one set went out and one came in. The announcement of what was behind the incoming door was waited for with anticipation. If the set of cattle was large, the mooing of the cattle could be heard. If the set was small, the door would swing open and close quickly, and the bidding would begin.

I do not want to be critical because the type of cattle that producers choose to raise is up to them, and the market does an excellent job at connecting the seller and buyer. However, sometimes thoughtful presale pondering by the producer on how those cattle will look at the market isn't always evident.

For the most part, there always is a buyer, but sometimes determining how to best present the cattle needs to be thought through. The concept that the auction market will sort away all the problems is not true. That being said, cattle that are unthrifty need to stay at home, eat some groceries and "beef up" a little bit. That may not be easy, but it certainly is a worthy goal for a beef operation.

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We can do better. However, there are too many “buts” in this story. Fundamentally, there is a larger issue than the simple management, presentation and sale of cattle, which is the genetics of the business. Those cattle that arrive for sale lacking good structure, condition and muscling are products of breeding programs.

As was noted at the beginning, focused breeding goals, with clear outcomes relevant to the production of beef, should be at the heart of all cattle operations. Simply breeding cows to produce calves with no thoughtful purpose challenges the industry. The competition appreciates those cattle, but the cattle industry should not.

As producers, the tools are readily available to assure the availability of bulls that will carry with them the genetics that will meet focused breeding goals and outcomes relevant to the production of excellent beef for consumption by the consumer.

The ultrasound evaluations of the cows are finished. The pregnancy rate is good, but my cold hands started my mind thinking some inside work would be good, which means bull buying. The bull sale books are starting to arrive, and the opportunity for proper selection of genetics means a better product.

Focused production goals for the Dickinson Research Extension Center that involve clear outcomes relevant to the production of beef are open for discussion. However, the Center has selected for birth, weaning and yearling weight, and ribeye area for several years. Attention to milk production and marbling also have been part of the selection process.

The real question is setting the percentile thresholds within the various breeds. The selection pressure is rising while keeping the bulls affordable. Not all bulls are created equally, so find the right bull, pay the right price and sell the right calves.

The hands are warm, so start figuring.

May you find all your ear tags.

For more information, contact Ringwall at 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to [www.ag.ndsu.edu/news/columns/beefstalk/](http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/news/columns/beefstalk/).

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