

Beef Talk: Register those bulls

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When buying registered bulls, always, always insist on transferring the registration number to your operation. Do not make the statement: “Well, the bull only will be used on commercial cows, so I do not need the bull registered.” That is wrong, just wrong.

The biggest toe-stubbing problem in the beef industry is the lack of understanding of the value of individual animal identification (AID). Now I know the chorus of objections will grow and hit a crescendo note, but that is OK. The point today is simple. Even

if individual AID numbers are not available for all the cattle in the inventory, the registration numbers available throughout the purebred business are critical and the heart of the breed association.

Did you know that for some breeds you can simply start registering cattle? By doing so, a producer starts to build a genetic database. Am I being overly enthusiastic? No. The registration numbers are a pathway to the genetic offering through the various breed associations.

Recently, I have been busy assisting producers at bull-buying workshops. These workshops seem to be appreciated as producers develop baseline or benchmark values for production traits of previous bulls utilized in the herd. Too often, the stumbling block is the lack of a registration number, which blocks access to the database that contains the bull’s information.

Genetic knowledge is critical to the future of the beef business. Without trying to upset anyone, bull circles encompass a lot of discussion, which is good. However, generally, if the breeder has done his or her homework, every bull has been registered and the genes that are available are known.

Even more exciting, as the DNA is analyzed for individual bulls and cows, the genomically enhanced expected progeny differences (GE-EPDs) are more accurate and increase the level of knowledge going into the calculations that produce the EPD value. Ever heard the saying: “Look it up; you will remember it longer?”

Access the data

At the Dickinson Research Extension Center, we occasionally are asked what bulls we are using and why. The answer is pretty simple. For our Red Angus bulls, the registration numbers are 1617805 and 1617778. For the Angus bulls, the registration numbers are 17628526 and 17698292. For the Simmental bulls, the registration numbers are 2669482, 2790504 and 2790544. We have one Shorthorn bull. His registration number is x4190244. Given those numbers, anyone can go to the various breed associations and look up the data on the bulls.

Some might feel this infringes on the owner’s space, but in the big picture, knowing the registration numbers and having the ability to access the performance data on bulls are very good tools in the beef producer’s toolbox.

The center’s EPD values for the various breeds reflect bulls that are lighter in birth weight and moderate in growth and milk. The center also places more emphasis on marbling and even more pressure on ribeye area. These selection criteria mean

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little or no assistance is needed for the cows calving on pasture. It also means the cattle have a practical frame package and excellent carcass traits.

Again, this discussion is best documented by reviewing the bull production numbers. The take-home point today is repeated and very simple: Always insist on transferring your registered bulls and always keep those past, present and future registration numbers.

Go one step further by joining the breed association of your choice and becoming involved in the utilization of the tools that are offered. Calf marketing programs are available through all the associations as an added benefit.

Still, cattle producers gather and the discussion is rich. However, at the end of the day, did the numbers get transferred? As I travel and visit with producers, those who bring to the table a portfolio of numbers can establish their historical selection criteria easily.

At times, someone will say he or she had no selection criteria. That really does not make any difference; the bulls that were used are the baseline for starting to understand what genetics are represented in the producer's cattle. If those calves meet with satisfaction from the producer, then similar bulls can be selected.

If something needs to be changed, tweak the numbers and change.

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/beeftalk/.

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