

Target your Market and Work Backwards to Select the Right Bulls...

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After all, when making breeding decisions your marketing objectives become part of the environment you operate within - similar to annual rainfall and available feedstuffs. They direct the focus of your selection and limit how aggressively you can affect genetic change.



Bull buyers with an experienced eye, paired with a seedstock supplier that provides breeding soundness exams and stands behind the bulls they sell will go a long way towards ensuring success.

Most bull selection decisions segregate into either mechanical or genetic requirements. Mechanical needs are the most immediate and address the job of getting your cows bred so there will be a next calf crop. If your sire selection doesn't get the mechanical component done, genetic improvement is a mute point. Bulls are the delivery system for the genetics they pass on, and to perform their job they must be sound, fertile and athletic. Bull buyers with an experienced eye, paired with a seedstock supplier that provides breeding soundness exams and stands behind the bulls they sell will go a long way towards ensuring success. The age and fertility of your existing bull battery is typically analyzed to determine the need for replacement bulls. This is also affected by the country you run in (how many cows you can expect a bull to cover) and whether you are buying yearling, long yearlings or 2-yr-old bulls.

Maintaining an adequate herd bull battery is fundamental to profitability. Every open cow is another replacement heifer that could have been cash-cropped, or one that must be purchased. Also, a tighter calving window increases calf crop uniformity which often means a higher selling price.

Genetic decisions, while less immediate, determine the "fit" of your ranch's annual production. The calves you produce must fit the markets you seek to participate in. Replacement females must fit your

production environment, so be prepared to live with the effects of your genetic decisions for years to come. Successful genetic decisions can be summarized by following these three steps:

1. Understand the traits needed to be successful in the market(s) you target. Feeder calves, yearlings, retained ownership, value based grids, replacement females all require a specific combination of traits.
2. Have a realistic appraisal of how close your cow herd is to that target.
3. Identify bulls whose EPDs predict the ability to move your cow herd in the right direction for those traits required to hit your market endpoint, while providing any replacements you produce with the ability to live and reproduce within your environment.

Following are examples of applied selection pressure to meet production and market needs:

Building a cow herd?

- Red Angus is the only breed that provides the opportunity to combine low expense traits Maintenance Energy Requirement (ME) with acceptable revenue traits such as Milk and Weaning Weight (WW) EPDs to improve efficiency in the cow herd.
- Improve pregnancy rate with selection pressure on Heifer Pregnancy (HPG) EPDs.
- Sleep through the night by keeping replacements out of higher Maternal Calving Ease (CETM) EPDs.
- Lower replacement rates by select-

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ing daughters from higher Stayability (STAY) EPD Sires.

- Increase/Decrease cow herd milking ability as needed by selecting higher/lower Milk EPDs. While increased milk typically translates into heavier weaning weights, it's easy to get cows that produce beyond their environment; when this happens pregnancy rate often suffers. As a rule, always temper selection for higher Milk EPD with selection for lower maintenance energy requirements (ME EPD).

Breeding virgin heifers?

- Select for a high Calving Ease Direct (CED) EPD as the most meaningful predictor of calving ease. Birth weight is a primary driver of calving ease, but there are other factors (calf shape, gestation length, etc.) Red Angus nests BW in this prediction, so selection for higher CED EPDs will typically find lower BW bulls, and will be a more accurate method of selecting heifer bulls.

Selling calves or yearlings?

- Heavier payweights may be achieved by selecting higher weaning weight (WW) EPDs, but...make sure heavier is what you want. While heavier weaning weights mean heavier payweights for calf feds, too much weaning weight could translate into yearlings that are too heavy when they enter the feed yard, and finish too late.

- Overshooting performance goals can be just as detrimental as falling short.

- Enhance your reputation - improve traits that impact feeder profits, such as carcass traits and post-weaning gain.

Retaining Ownership?

- Docile and fast starting, Red Angus are easy to start on feed and keep on feed.

- Balance Yearling weight EPD of potential bulls with the existing cow herd to pinpoint needed improvement for post weaning gains.

Selling on a Grid?

- Fine-tune marbling (MARB), rib eye area (REA), and back fat (FAT) EPDs to target quality or yield grade based grids.

- Balance Carcass EPDs against existing cow herd; breeding away from YG 4 discounts.

- Cowherds of higher continental influence may require additional selection pressure on marbling EPD to improve quality grade.

- High percentage British cowherds typically benefit from selection for larger ribeye Red Angus or Red Angus x Continental hybrid bulls. ■