Taking the Guesswork Out Of Sire Selection

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The objectives obtainable to beef cattle producers through skilled sire selection include: improving cowherd efficiency, enhancing revenue traits, and shortening calving periods. Generally speaking, use of higher accuracy sires promotes consistency, uniformity and allows faster genetic progress in ranchers' chosen direction.

Obtaining the genetic potential to balance economically relevant traits could possibly be realized faster and in a more consistent manner with the use of the proper AI sire(s).

The availability of such proven sires is one of the major benefits available through incorporating a well designed A.I. (artificial insemination) program. Unfortunately, poor genetic choices made during such sire selections can move a producer just as quickly away from profitability. Therefore, careful consideration should be given to the balance of economically relevant traits and phenotype as it relates to each cattleman's herd prior to the sire selection component of an AI program.

Let's discuss what might constitute a solid thought process involving a successful artificial insemination program. The impact that a single sire can have on a herd can be incredibly large by percentage. I realize that not everyone uses just one sire in an AI program, however it is conceivable that just one bull could produce sixty to seventy percent of an individual producer's calf crop. I believe that statement alone would convince producers to make certain they have matched appropriate sires with appropriate goals for their respective programs.

Analyze your goals: are performance/production targets practical for your environment? Do those targets fit your marketing plans, i.e, will you be selling calves, yearlings, retaining ownership, raising your own replacements, selling excess heifers as open or bred? Answering these questions will help make breeding goals more obtainable, and ultimately serve to guide your herd down the right genetic path towards long-term aspirations.

Production of sound females is critical to any commercial breeder that develops their own cow herd by retaining replacement heifers. This is certainly an easy place to discuss how artificial insemination could swiftly move herd improvement in a given direction. Red Angus producers have several tools available that will improve mother cow efficiency. At this point in your thought process you should be

looking for sires with EPDs that make your females more economically sound. Maintenance Energy EPD because you want the females to be efficient to own with the lowest amount of inputs possible. Stayability EPD so your cows maintain longevity. Other considerations would include Calving Ease Direct, Calving Ease Maternal and Heifer Pregnancy EPD. Obviously, fertility is of the utmost importance for all replacement females, but even more so for an operation that relies on AI for acceptable conception rates.

Before you even choose an AI sire, determine your end point. If you know what goal you're headed towards, then the avenue to get there is easier to map out.

Most producers would certainly not forget about traits that add weight to the calf crop and therefore have the opportunity to add profitability to their operations. With that in mind using EPDs for weaning weight, yearling weight and total maternal ultimately adds pounds at market time. Value of these pounds of cattle produced may be realized at time of harvest. To increase that value you could consider tools such as EPDs for carcass quality and yield. These Red Angus values are expressed as Rib Eye Area, Marbling score and Back Fat thickness.

While all of these traits have relevance, you know that proper application is crucial as some of the factors are antagonistic. Heavy attention to performance can cause strain on the efficiency and fertility of your females. Obtaining the genetic potential to balance these economically relevant traits could possibly be realized faster and in a more consistent manner with the use of the proper AI sire(s). Logically speaking then, the wrong AI sire(s) could cause these antagonisms to damage your herd.

Discussing the importance of carefully considering genetic value while making sire choices would not be complete without mentioning accuracies. EPDs are the most reliable predictors of genetic value in our cattle, but some sires are obviously more reliable than others. Due to the impact that an AI sire can have on a herd, accuracies become even more important. Having the confidence that a sire will produce like you predict may come from the accuracies that accompany EPDs. Producers should conduct the necessary research before beginning to breed their cows.

How about options for marketing your AI sired Red Angus feeder cattle? Before you even choose an AI sire, determine your end point. If you know what goal you're headed towards, then the avenue to get there is easier to map out. There are many oppor-

tunities within the Red Angus breed for marketing cattle. One decision to make is if the cattle will be enrolled in the Feeder Calf Certification Program (FCCP). Source and age verified cattle, like the ones that are FCCP tagged, engage in a more competitive market thus making premiums available to them. Special FCCP sales and video auctions reported $2.00 to $3.50/CWT higher sales for cattle that were source and age verified last fall. A $2.75/cwt average is a 15 to 1 return on the $.99 tag for 550 pound cattle. AI sired calves that are carrying the FCCP tag, and are consistently bred for high quality could easily gain those kinds of premiums. In turn, those cattle could be more desirable at harvest time and gain added premiums at the packer level as well. Continuing to produce that kind of quality for the packers and retailers can create more market excitement for an individual's cattle in the future.

Aside from finding a practical and feasible market for your Red Angus feeder cattle, you may also need to market the female progeny of your AI sires. The ability to market uniform packages of females is the fastest way to add value and speed the sale of replacements heifers. Through these high value replacements, the benefits of AI are additive...compounding value through contributing their own superior economically relevant traits to a subsequent generation of even higher value more uniform feeder calves, fed cattle and replacement females.

Gaining superior genetics from the use of AI does not fit every cattle breeder's operation. In fact, only about six percent of beef cattle in the United States are bred this way. Once a breeder determines the desired goals for their program, sound decisions can be made about the pathway to reach those goals. The message is not choosing whether or not to AI your cattle, but realizing the importance of making sound genetic decisions when using a tool that can have such a large impact on the future of your operation. ■