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Contact: Doc or Patricia Spitzer  
[spitzeranch@mindspring.com](mailto:spitzeranch@mindspring.com) or  
(864)972-9140 or (864)710-0257

## **Calving Ease, Growth And Curve Bender Bulls**

All cattlemen recognize that profitability is always enhanced when calves are born with no assistance, usually implying a low or at least manageable birth weight. Yet pounds are the marketable product so fast growth following birth is absolutely essential. Unfortunately growth, probably best measured by yearling weight, is positively correlated with birth weight and negatively correlated with calving ease. Correlation is a numerical measure ranging between +1.0 and -1.0 which describes how two, or more, cattle production traits are related. A high positive correlation means that as one trait increases, the other trait does as well. In our example, cattle with greater than average growth generally will have increased birth weight as well. Conversely when traits are negatively correlated, if one is above average the other is likely to be below average. Again with our example, as growth and birth weight increase, decreased calving ease with a dramatic increase in assisted births are likely to occur.

But the correlations are never 1.0 and -1.0. A really good paper is the Oklahoma State University selection experiment in Angus cattle reported by Aaron, Frahm and Buchanan where the observed correlation between birth weight and yearling weight was between 0.42 and 0.51 (which is considered a pretty high correlation with cattle traits). **Yet there are bulls in the industry that defy the concept that increased growth results in increased birth weights and the associated decrease in easy calving.** They are genetic outliers that defy the statistical odds and the industry has come to call those bulls “curve benders”. These bulls are not easy to find and are harder yet to consistently produce unless a disciplined plan is in place to modify the genetics in an entire herd specifically aiming in the direction of lowering birth weight and increasing growth at the same time.

The Spitzer Ranch genetic selection program has done exactly that. They have a 31 year history of a very disciplined selection strategy of stacking AI sires, generation after generation, along with using only the best sons of those AI sires in natural service. Those AI and natural service sires were consistently chosen to exhibit lowered birth weight and greater potential for growth. They have therefore designed their Brangus cattle to have lower birth weights with better calving ease and yet higher growth in a frame score package somewhere between a 5.5 and a 6.5; just where the entire industry indicates cattle ought to be size wise.

The Spitzers believe so strongly in that concept that they invested years developing their exclusive Curve Bender Index (CBI) to place a numerical score on all bulls offered in their annual sale. Additionally their sale order is determined by the CBI ranking, highest to lowest for individual bulls. The Spitzer Ranch CBI is a genetic index that accounts for lower birth weight EPDs and higher yearling weight EPDs at the same time and puts those antagonistic traits into one numerical measurement. Recognize bulls with a Higher CBI have to be in the Brangus Breed Top Percent Rank for both the traits of low birth weight and yet heavier yearling weight. Furthermore, to be a low birth weight EPD bull and at the same time a high yearling weight EPD bull means the average daily gain (ADG) from birth to weaning or yearling age must also be greater.

Another advantage of the selection program followed by Spitzer Ranch is production of a high number of calving ease bulls for use on virgin heifers. Of the bulls currently being developed for their February 2013 Bull Sale, one half will earn the Spitzer Ranch Calving Ease Flag. Calving Ease Bulls are those with breed average (or lower) BW EPD and no more than a 79 pound actual birth weight. While there are no guarantees as to never having to pull a calf from a heifer calving for her first time, these criteria sure eliminate genetics on the bull side from being a problem.

The **2013 SPITZER RANCH PROFESSIONAL CATTLEMEN'S BRANGUS BULL SALE and CUSTOMER COMMERCIAL BRANGUS FEMALE SALE** are scheduled for **Saturday, February 23, 2013**. You are invited to investigate the Spitzer Ranch Program, their cooperators and customers, and learn how SPITZER RANCH BRANGUS GENETICS can increase the profitability of your cattle operation. A full listing of sires and complete and total performance data on all bulls being offered for sale will be available in the Spitzer Ranch Winter 2013 Newsletter slated to go in the mail right after Christmas. The Spitzer Family extends to you a personal invitation to have your name added to their rapidly growing mailing list. Just call 864/972-9140, write SPITZER RANCH, 1511 HWY 59, Fair Play, SC, 29643 or send an email note to [spitzeranch@mindspring.com](mailto:spitzeranch@mindspring.com). Be sure to learn more about their program by visiting their website at [www.srbulls.com](http://www.srbulls.com) and you might enjoy following their posts and QUOTE OF THE WEEK on Facebook.

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