

For Immediate Release
FAIR PLAY, SC
November 3, 2012

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

If You Want Your Cows To Have Heavier Calves At Weaning Then Select Bulls With Greater Yearling Weight EPDs

Pounds of calf weaned per cow in the breeding herd has time and again been accurately shown to be the greatest profit driver in commercial beef production. It is a compilation of how many calves were weaned (percent calf crop) and how much they weighed (weaning weight). Over the years, Spitzer Ranch has “preached the crossbred cow” for the main reason that heterosis for pregnancy and other reproductive and survival traits are essential to getting more calves born and weaned from the beef herd. Once you have the right crossbred cow and an adequate amount of milk for your environment bred into your specific cow herd, then selection for growth in the bulls purchased is critical to heavier weaning weights.

How one would select for growth, however, may not be as simple as it seems. A typical representative of the many long term selection studies is the research report from Oklahoma State University. Initially a group of Angus cows was split into separate herds with replacements for those distinct herds selected within each herd for: 1.) Weaning weight - weaning weight line (**WWL**); 2.) Yearling weight - yearling weight line (**YWL**); and an unselected control line (**CL**). No outside bulls were ever introduced and all selection was within each specific herd or line.

Over the 16-year study weaning weight for male calves in the **WWL** increased by 14 pounds over weaning weight for male calves in the **CL**. Over the same time period, yearling weight for male calves in the **YWL** increased by 47 pounds over yearling weight for male calves in the **CL**. However, the rest of the story is that weaning weight for male calves in the **YWL** went up 6 additional pounds over weaning weight for male calves in the **WWL**. Bottom line is that selecting for yearling weight increased weaning weight more than selecting directly for weaning weight.

When many of the original selection experiments were started in the 1950's and 1960's the industry did not have the more accurate selection tool of expected progeny differences (EPDs). A much more recent project from the University of Georgia split a Hereford cow herd into

two groups: 1.) **CONTROL LINE** cows were bred over the entire six years to the same two bulls originally selected from within the herd; 2.) **SELECTED LINE** cows were artificially bred to a total of 16 AI sires with yearling weight EPDs representing the Top 1% of all bulls from the Hereford Sire Summary each year. That is extremely high selection intensity, but represents what is possible to accomplish. In the first year there was an increase of 7 pounds of weaning weight and 31 pounds of yearling weight when comparing the **SELECTED LINE** to the **CONTROL LINE**. At the end of the six year study there was an increase of 61 pounds more weaning weight and 97 pounds more yearling weight in the **SELECTED LINE** compared to the **CONTROL LINE**. Again note that weaning weight increased dramatically even though the selection was for yearling weight EPD.

Not particularly surprising because weaning weight is a component of yearling weight and when you select for yearling weight you are really selecting for both weaning weight and yearling weight. In fact yearling weight EPDs are actually computed by adding a calculated term called post weaning gain EPD to the weaning weight EPD. (Whatever you do, do not use both WW EPD and YW EPD as selection criteria for growth as you are then “double dipping”.)

It should be clear that today the most effective way to increase growth, at either weaning or yearling age, is to select bulls based on yearling weight EPD. However you must remember that growth traits are positively correlated with birth weight and when you select for more growth, birth weight generally goes up. However, the correlation is not absolute and there are bulls in all breeds that blow big holes in the general concept that increased growth results in heavier birth weight. These bulls are “genetic outliers” that defy the statistical odds and the industry has come to call them “curve benders”. They are not easy to find and are even 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 consistently used only those sires that exhibit lowered birth weight and greater potential for growth. They have therefore designed their Brangus cattle to have lighter birth weights with better calving ease and yet higher growth. The Spitzers believe so strongly in that concept that they invested years developing their exclusive Curve Bender Index (CBI) which 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 their average daily gain from birth to weaning or yearling age must also be greater.

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. Be sure to learn more about their program by visiting their website at www.srbulls.com and you might enjoy following their posts and QUOTE OF THE WEEK on Facebook.

END