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Simplify Your Bull Selection Decisions

There certainly have been many articles written on bull selection as it is a key strategic decision for cattle owners. Many of these were informative and most very scientifically and genetically correct, but they all seem very complex to the commercial producer trying to make a living in the beef business. Have we forgotten that SIMPLE has tremendous value? If you sell all your calves straight off the cow at weaning your income is determined by a live calf that grows fast. If you back-ground and precondition your calves for 45-60 days and sell in a special sale your income is determined by a live calf that grows fast. If you stocker your calves and sell yearlings your income is determined by a live calf that grows fast. If you retain ownership clear through the feedlot your income is determined by a live calf that grows fast. Sounds a little redundant? Everything else you can select for is secondary to a **“live calf and fast growth”**.

The most practically astute statement ever made was by Dr. Rex Butterfield, “the growth rate of a dead calf is distressingly poor”, said with the inflection of an impressive Australian accent. It is certainly stating the obvious, but we seem to constantly forget that live calves make more money than anything else we can do to increase income. Calf birth weight plays a huge role in determining whether or not a calf is born alive and gets up and nurses quickly. Calves can certainly be too big, but they can also be too small. Pay attention to BW EPDs as they are the best predictor of what to expect as far as the birth weight of calves born to your cows being too light, very manageable or too heavy. When dealing with first-calf females the birth weight EPD decision becomes even more critical in that lots of dead calves can be further compounded by delayed return to estrus and lower rebreeding rates when first-calf cows

experience calving problems; even if the calf is born alive. Calving difficulty can cause her to be delayed by one to three weeks or more in coming back in heat after calving and most data show her calving much later, if at all, in the subsequent year.

But, single trait selection for low birth weight can certainly backfire as there is a genetic correlation between birth weight and all of the growth traits. That is, if you select solely for low birth weight, you will get light weaning and yearling weights and slower growing calves. However, recent data from a research study conducted at USDA-MARC, Clay Center, NE that contained almost 9000 calves proved that you can select for **lower birth weights and more growth** at the same time and break the genetic antagonism. From that study there were additionally many positive effects on other economically relevant traits that result in increased profitability from that type of a genetic selection program. (For published references and/or a simplified write-up on the USDA-MARC research reports, contact Spitzer Ranch.)

Simple bull selection then becomes evaluating both birth weight EPDs and yearling weight EPDs first (selecting for yearling weight actually increases weaning weight faster than selecting for weaning weight). Get the **“live calf and fast growth”**, which together generate the most income, down pat and only then select for other traits as they will only mean something if these two are done correctly. Of course you should go on to select for more (or maybe less) milk production and frame score; and then give some emphasis to the carcass traits.

Your profitability in the commercial cattle industry may depend on finding a bull supplier who has done their homework in these two areas and better still, find one that has created an index that ranks their bulls on lower birth weight and faster growth. Probably best said by Dr. Jason Cleere of Texas A&M, “producers should consider buying from a breeder who specializes in producing quality genetics for commercial operations”. Those will certainly be the kind of

bull suppliers who understand what makes commercial cattle operations the most money.

The SPITZER RANCH PROFESSIONAL CATTLEMEN'S BRANGUS BULL SALE is scheduled for SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2014. Spitzer Ranch has a 31 year history of producing bulls for commercial beef producers. They were among the first to recognize that selection for both lower birth weights and faster growth could be accomplished if you worked at it hard enough. The Spitzer Ranch CURVE BENDER INDEX (CBI) still leads the way in providing one genetic selection tool and one number that results in moderating birth weight and increasing growth at the same time. If you wish your name added to their mailing list for Newsletters and current Bull Test Performance Reports call 864/972-9140, write SPITZER RANCH, 1511 HWY 59, Fair Play, SC, 29643 or send an email note to spitzeranch@mindspring.com. Their SUMMER 2013 NEWSLETTER (with all performance statistics collected to date on each and every bull being developed for the 2014 sale) has already been delivered to those on their mailing list, but there are a few left and they would be happy to send one to you. Be sure and visit their WEB SITE at www.srbulls.com often for the latest in news; and you might enjoy their posts and QUOTE OF THE WEEK on Facebook.

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