

For Immediate Release
FAIR PLAY, SC
May 1, 2013

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The Power Of “On Farm” Bull Testing Programs

Many Land Grant University Extension programs have been built around Central Bull Test Stations where individual producers sent a bull or two to be “gain tested”. History has shown those Bull Tests to be of real value in promoting, record keeping, performance testing and even more so as valuable publicity for individual registered beef programs. But times change and the bull buying customer is now certainly more interested in what we do today and tomorrow rather than what we did yesterday.

Spitzer Ranch does not send bulls to Central Bull Test Stations for a variety of reasons. By far the reason that overshadows all others is maintaining the largest possible contemporary group from birth through weaning and on to yearling age and ultrasound carcass measurements. The Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) defines a contemporary group as: *A group of cattle that are of the same sex, are similar in age (90-day range), and have been raised in the same management and environmental conditions (same location and on the same feed and pasture).* In this case that is: **A group of bulls that are raised together and are managed totally alike from birth until they are yearling age.**

Absolute weights and pounds-of-gain per day are totally meaningless without valid contemporary grouping and the ratios calculated from the average performance of a valid contemporary group. In fact, it is those ratios (actually differences in how the individual bull performed compared to the average performance of all bulls in that contemporary group) that are used to calculate Expected Progeny Differences (EPDs) for a whole variety of traits. A single bull may have the absolute highest average daily gain (ADG) or largest Rib Eye Area ultrasound

scan of all bulls at a Central Bull Test Station and those measurements will not contribute anything to the value or accuracy of his EPD since the integrity of the contemporary group for that individual bull has been violated. Therefore the advantage of an “On Farm” bull testing and development program like that employed by Spitzer Ranch is the ability to test large, intact contemporary groups of bulls that have been managed alike since birth. It is only data collected from maintaining those valid contemporary groups that is useful for calculating genetic predictions. Those data then exponentially increase the power, accuracy and integrity of performance data reported on Spitzer Ranch bulls.

A second, but vitally important, reason Spitzer Ranch sends no bulls to Central Bull Test Stations is their ability to control the group-average gain per day and the amount of fat those young bulls accumulate. Their program is centered around a pasture based system where bulls get forage grazing on a daily basis. Bulls are supplemented with a soy hull and corn gluten feed ration calculated for bulls to finish the development program as yearlings with an overall group average daily gain (ADG) of close to 3.25 pounds per day. This is not the maximum weight these bulls are capable of gaining, but is certainly a sufficient ADG to sort out which bulls have the ability to perform. More important the lower ADG produces functional, athletic bulls ready to breed cows. Over 20 years of collecting data with that system indicates those yearling bulls will weigh close to 1200 pounds and have somewhere close to ¼ inch of fat cover over the rib.

Bulls at many Central Bull Test Stations have ADGs of 4 to 5 pounds per day and some as high as 6 pounds per day. That’s why most people call them “gain tests”. Many of those bulls also have ½ inch or more of fat cover over the rib. Aside from any detrimental effects that amount of fat has on fertility, athleticism in the breeding pasture and longevity, it seems silly. Why? Because the feedlot industry attempts to get steers and heifers to the packer at somewhere close to 0.45 to 0.50 inch of fat cover. Their data tell them that if a feedlot animal has the

genetic potential for a carcass grade of choice it should do so with 0.45 to 0.50 inch of fat. Feeding longer to get the animal fatter will generally not improve their chances of grading choice. Therefore, why would we ever want our breeding bulls to be as fat, or fatter, than feedlot animals at the time of slaughter?

Would you like to follow a Seedstock Operation that has a genetic program aligned with the needs of the profit driven cattleman? Would you like to buy bulls from a Seedstock Operation that has a no frills method of developing bulls to be more functional at getting your cows pregnant and with a long productive life as a breeding bull? If that is of interest to you, mark your calendar for the 2014 edition of the SPITZER RANCH PROFESSIONAL CATTLEMEN'S BRANGUS BULL SALE scheduled for SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2014.

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. Also be sure to visit their WEB SITE at www.srbulls.com and you might enjoy their posts and QUOTE OF THE WEEK on Facebook.

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