

The Bull Determines Your Herd's Future Genetics

If you're a beef producer, you may be considering replacing your herd bull before the upcoming breeding season. Your herd bull offers you the greatest potential to increase the genetic potential and profitability of your operation. I know you enjoy what you do or you wouldn't be a beef producer, but you owe it to yourself to get the best possible returns on your investment.

Whether or not you save and grow your own heifers or if you are buying replacement heifers and selling feeder calves, there is a bull that will better fit your herd objectives. There are several factors to consider when evaluating a bull such as skeletal structure, the head, the shoulders, his feet and legs, length, muscling, frame size, sexual characteristics, and many others. All of these are visual tools, but let's not forget about EPDs, which stands for expected progeny differences. This is a great tool to evaluate bulls within a breed giving an indication of how a bull will perform related to his peers. This tool will not work across different breeds.

According to Dr. David Kirkpatrick, UT Extension Beef Specialist, "EPDs are a means of estimating an individual's genetic value as a parent for a particular trait." There are production trait EPDs for birth weight, calving ease, milk, weaning weight, yearling weight, and frame size. There are also carcass trait EPDs such as ribeye area and marbling or intramuscular fat.

EPDs offer the beef producer an edge in making the correct decision when purchasing a bull. One of the more common decisions made based on EPDs are birth weight. If you're breeding heifers, you can benefit by placing emphasis on purchasing a bull with a low birth weight EPD. Many producers would prefer a birth weight EPD under 1.0 when breeding heifers. Without a doubt, it's difficult to make money when you're pulling calves from heifers and possibly losing calves due to calving difficulty. This could be the result if you breed heifers to a bull purchased without the benefits of considering the birth weight EPD. Other benefits of considering EPDs are increasing the pounds of beef you're selling, improving the genetic potential of your heifers, improving the carcass quality of your final product, and many others.

There are many opportunities to purchase quality bulls in Northeast TN and Southwest VA area including performance test bull sales and on-farm sales. Your next bull may be the most important decision you make next year for your operation. It's no different than selecting the most profitable investment at the local bank for your hard earned money.