

Step 1 for Buying a Bull: Find the Base Herd EPD Values

The bull's EPD values are the best representation of who he is.

The first step when buying a new bull is to access the traits of the old bulls. Breeding programs tend to be long term, and the current herd is a product of the old bulls.

Let's not get hung up on numbers. Instead, let's ask and answer some questions. As a herd manager, are you satisfied with the output of the herd? Do you enjoy the cattle? Are the calves the type you want to produce? Is there a demand for the calves? What does the market say about the calves?

This does not need to be a complicated process. As you review the herd, do you smile or wish for a better herd? When the neighbor comes over, are there cows you do not want seen or is the whole herd open for public viewing? When the calves are sold, do they sell as one or do you partition some off into smaller lots? Do you slip some through to the off days at the market?

Satisfaction with the present is the goal of yesterday's bull buying. There are a lot of ways to measure

production, but the key to satisfaction rests in the heart of the producer. If you are satisfied, try to buy bulls of a similar genetic makeup as before. If you are not satisfied, then define the bulls that previously were purchased and head in a different direction.

Remember that commercial producers buy bulls, and it is those bulls that are the focus of imported genetics within the herd. One half of the genetic material in the cow herd will trace directly to the bulls that sired the cows.

That genetic material is the expected progeny difference (EPD) values of the purchased bulls. An individual calf receives half of its genes (bull EPD values) from the sire and, on average, one-fourth of the remaining genes come from the EPD values of the maternal grandsire and one-fourth comes from the maternal granddam.

For the average calf, the sire and the maternal grandsire are projected to have contributed three-fourths of the calves' genes. Although

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somewhat challenging to do all the math, on average, if one goes back an additional generation, 87.5% of the genes within the calf crop are potentially accounted for by the EPD values of the last three sets of bulls that the producer purchased.

One should notice the inclusion of the term EPD within the previous discussion. The bull's EPD values are the best representation of who he is. The best evaluation of current and past bulls is to look up their EPD values. That process is not difficult, provided one has maintained the registration numbers of the bulls.

The biggest mistake purebred or commercial producers make when buying bulls is not having the bull registrations transferred to their name. That is a serious mistake. All registered bulls should be transferred to their new owner. Breed associations constantly are updating their databases and fine-tuning the EPDs for all bulls, especially with the genomic opportunities available to enhance genetic evaluations. As your bull ages on your place, his data is growing at breed headquarters. In time, a producer can print the revised EPDs to better evaluate selection objectives and progress by reviewing past bull purchases, along with new purchases.

Thus the point for today: After acknowledging your level of satisfaction with the herd but before doing anything else, find out what bulls created the current herd. Find a spreadsheet or simple piece of paper and list the current bulls by registration number and then go to the appropriate breed association website and look up selected EPD values for those bulls.

The simplest is to utilize what one might call the "touchy, feely traits." In other words, the traits one understands.

At the Dickinson Research Extension Center, I like to use four baseline traits because they are simple growth traits. The four traits are EPDs for birth weight, weaning weight, yearling weight and ribeye area.

In addition, I usually list the milk and marbling EPDs as tag-along traits because they have a huge impact within the genetics of the beef business.

A producer can pick any trait or index to include on the evaluation sheet for past bulls. However, do not make the process too complicated because too many numbers written on a page cloud the mind.

The point is to list the traits and average the values for past bulls. That average EPD value for each trait drives the current performance of the herd. Now you know why the herd is what it is.

EPDs are the tools used to determine if you want to stay the course or change the herd. You decide. **HW**

Finding Hereford EPDs

Producers can visit Hereford.org for resources related to individual animal performance as well as basic performance and marketing tools.

The American Hereford Association (AHA) measures 14 traits and calculates four profit (\$) indexes. The Hereford Sire Summary, which is produced each spring and posted online, provides breeders with a tremendous amount of information on a large population of Hereford sires. The "Records/TPR" page on Hereford.org has links to the Hereford Sire Summary and Trends & Distribution Report.

The Trends & Distributions Report contains information on the breed average expected progeny differences (EPDs) for each of the 14 reported traits. Additionally, this report contains a listing of the EPD distributions of active sires, active dams and calves born in the past two years broken down by percentile rankings for each of the EPD traits. There are four "trait leader" reports available that provide the top 200 animals of specific classes or types in the Hereford breed based on the \$Profit Indexes, which use multiple EPD criteria in their calculation. An explanation can be found within each of the reports.

Breeders can also visit the AHA website and do a comprehensive sort of Hereford sires — go to Hereford.org and click on "EPD Search." Producers can do a sort on an individual EPD range or on multiple EPD parameters.

Utilizing the AHA website to look up EPDs allows breeders to efficiently research and sort performance information for their future breeding decisions. The EPD lookup utilities and animal search features used in conjunction with the following report files that are offered can provide you many useful tools for making comparative decisions when evaluating your herd or making a decision on which animals to use in the upcoming breeding season.

Authorized users — individuals, ranches, farms or companies — that have set up an AHA Internet account, can utilize the "Mating Predictor." This tool facilitates planned matings by allowing breeders to enter a sire or sires by registration number and then select females by registration number or from their herd inventory.

For more information about Hereford resources and tools contact Christy Bradshaw, AHA education coordinator, at 816-842-3757 or cbradshaw@hereford.org. **HW**

Guest - AHA Hereford Animal Inquiry by EPD

Home Animal Inquiry EPD Inquiry Member Inquiry Sale Catalogs Semen Catalogs

Enter Selection Criteria Then Click Search

Clear Search

Name:	<input type="text"/>			<small>Enter the start of an animal's name</small>
Registration No(s):	<input type="text"/>			<small>Enter one or more animal Regn. No. separated by commas</small>
Calving Year(s):	<input type="text"/>			<small>Enter one or more Calving Years separated by commas</small>
Listing Type:	<input type="checkbox"/> Any <input type="checkbox"/> Published in Sire Summary <input type="checkbox"/> Currently Listed for Sale <input type="checkbox"/> Listed in Semen Catalog			
Select it:	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	
Select it:	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	
Select it:	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	
Horn Status:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both <input type="checkbox"/> Horned <input type="checkbox"/> Polled			
GE-EPD:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Any <input type="checkbox"/> GE-EPD Animal			
Sire Name:	<input type="text"/>			
Dam Name:	<input type="text"/>			

Trait Description	Min	Max	Min. Accuracy (Enter as whole number, not decimal)	Breed Avg *
Calv. Ease Direct (%)				0.9
Birth Wt				3.3
Weaning Wt				47
Yearling Wt				77
Milk				19
Milk & Growth				43
Calv. Ease Mat. (%)				1.2
Mature Cow Weight				87
Udder Suspension				1.13
Teat Size				1.13
Scrotal Circ.				0.6
Fat				0.003
Rib Eye Area				0.30
Marbling				0.07
BMI Index (\$)				17
CEZ Index (\$)				-15
BI Index (\$)				15
CHB Index (\$)				22

Sort By Regn. No. Default Ascending Descending

On EPD Listing Display Animal Name Registration No.

* Breed Avg. EPDs for 2013 Born Calves (Click for Percentiles)

How to use these search facilities

Clear Search

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