



PHOTOS COURTESY OF KEVIN SHAFFER

Wardensville Bull Test Celebrates 50 Years

West Virginia bull test celebrates anniversary by maintaining relevance to industry.

by *Kasey Brown*, special projects editor

Bull tests have many benefits for cattlemen, breed associations and the cattle industry at large. That's why there are so many bull tests across the country, but few have reached the milestone of a 50-year anniversary.

Since its inception in 1967 as part of the West Virginia Beef Cattle Improvement Association, the Wardensville Bull Test Program has made concerted efforts to remain relevant. Kevin Shaffer, West Virginia University Extension livestock production specialist and bull test coordinator, says the test's coordinators (only three in its history), advisory board and producers have been committed to a quality test even when it wasn't the easier choice.

Wayne Wagner, retired test coordinator of 30 years and current consignor, says, "From the beginning, the mission has been to provide the commercial cattle industry in and around West Virginia with a source of bulls that could help commercial cattlemen be more productive and economically competitive than they would be without the program."

To accomplish this mission, the Wardensville Bull Test has been willing to incorporate new technologies and enforce strict standards. Wagner explains that the

Wardensville test started incorporating expected progeny differences (EPDs) in the 1980s as proof of their usefulness when they were newly developed. The test was also an early adopter of using EPDs in the test index.

Both Shaffer and Wagner say a distinguishing feature of the Wardensville test is the collection of individual feed intake data. Wardensville was the first bull test program to install the GrowSafe® feed efficiency monitoring system in 2003.

Despite interest, measuring feed efficiency is difficult and expensive. Additionally, Wagner says, the industry and researchers



► Buyers of all ages like to study sale books in advance of the bull sale.

couldn't identify a measure of efficiency that allowed for selection that would actually change genetics for efficiency of metabolic feed utilization. In the early 2000s, researchers began to express feed efficiency as residual feed intake (RFI), and Wardensville has used RFI to express feed efficiency ever since.

The test offers services and technology financially unavailable to smaller breeders, and offers marketing value. However, the benefits affect more than consignors.

Shaffer agrees that commitment by producers contributes to the test's success. The test has strict consignment requirements. For example, breeders cannot consign a single bull. Breeders must consign at least three bulls from the same contemporary group, and that contemporary group must have at least 10 or more animals in it. Shaffer explains this

increases data accuracy, especially when it is submitted to national breed associations.

The test is committed to unbiased data collection.

"We are extremely conscientious of data accuracy, so we replicate each

measurement," Shaffer notes. Additionally, he explains that the sale eligibility isn't determined by the test index anymore. It has changed to individual-trait culling levels.

"Our goal is to keep our evaluation program meeting and exceeding BIF (Beef Improvement Federation) regulations," he explains.

"Most of our consignors are repeat consignors, and the majority of them have been consigning bulls for at least 15-20 years. These folks are committed to performance evaluation and making themselves better. We've made this a challenging program, and I commend those that challenge themselves to participate."

Sisters Sarah and Margaret Page of Fort Hill Farm are fourth-generation consignors to the program. Sarah explains why they continue the family's tradition of test participation, "Our family has always been interested in the performance of our Angus cattle, and we have used AHIR® (Angus Herd Improvement Records) and MaternalPlus® for measuring performance on the farm. We are also interested in seeing how our bull calves perform against [those of] other cattle producers. Having the Wardensville Bull Test close to our farm has given us the opportunity to see how we measure up and what genetics work the best for us."

For information on the Wardensville Bull Test program, visit bulltest.ext.wvu.edu.



