



# Central Tests, Part II: High gains on high grain

*We continue our exploration of the changing terrain known as the performance, bull, or central test. As EPD becomes the benchmark on the testing scene, we've asked several test station managers their reactions to this and other developments affecting the beef performance industry such as specification beef Part I appeared in the March, 1988, Angus Journal.*

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DR. CHARLES McPEAKE, O.B.I. (Oklahoma BEEF Inc.), Stillwater, Oklahoma

Dr. Charles McPeake manages this nationally known and respected station. OBI began operation in 1973 as a joint venture between 26 Hereford breeders and 25 Angus breeders contributing toward a facility. Oklahoma State University personnel provides the workforce. Six breeds now test at the station and administer their own rules and regulations. In addition to the gaining data taken, ribeye area, rib fat thickness, scrotal circumference and adjusted 365-day hip height measurements are also gathered on each bull entered.

*Any criticism raised against gains being too high?*

The first thing we need to understand about Oklahoma BEEF Inc., is that it sits in an agricultural-based situation where we don't really have a large quantity of forage. The ration we feed at OBI is strictly a grain-based ration, and that's one of the reasons our gains are so high compared to test stations where they have a silage or high-forage base.

I don't think it makes a great deal of difference about the gains of a contemporary group of bulls as long as you have enough variation in them where you can tell the good from the bad. I think there should be a minimum gain, but in terms of maximum gain, it should be approached with the realization that we aren't harming the future productivity of those bulls.

*Don't high gains allow bulls to express muscularity, masculinity, and superior sperm production?*

On some bulls that mature more quickly, I can say yes to superior sperm production at a shorter age. In terms of higher gaining bulls being more masculine and producing sperm more readily, I don't know that such really holds true.

*OBI measures a great variety of carcass and fertility traits. Are producers paying enough attention to these, or are they overshadowed by top gains?*

We're in a situation now-and it's been this way for the last three to four years-where specification beef has brought on a new concept in looking at live animal evaluation especially in ribeye measurements and mass measurements. Oklahoma BEEF has reported these since its inception. I think we probably have as many folks here looking at these carcass predictors as any place in the country.

*Should the central test of tomorrow become the mathematical proof of sire summary data and EPD?*

Yes. Definitely yes. I think we need to expect a breakthrough in mathematical calculations and EPD and the theory of how EPD are devised to where we'll be able to add the central test data in to help calculate EPD of the future. I think one can support the other. That's the way I'd like to visualize breed association programs utilizing EPD. It's a matter of time. My major concern is that these concepts eventually be brought to where they can be working together.

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***Shouldn't feed efficiency OF Average Daily Gain as an indicator of feed efficiency yield producers enough degree of confidence in selecting heifer replacements? Shouldn't the heifermates of these high-gaining bulls be easy keepers? Is this assumption valid and provable by heritability OF demonstrated by experience?***

If a bull has individual feed efficiency, and there's a history of sire feed efficiency, you should probably have some degree of confidence in selecting heifer replacements. Too many times we've left ADG as an indicator of group basis-and yes, we need to know what cattle are doing as a group and ADG is a reliable indicator-but for feed efficiency in beef cattle we're not testing for that as a group. We don't use a group of bulls in a one-sire herd; we're using individuals and looking for those bulls that convert real efficiently. Then we'll use that single sire when we find him. In reality we're looking for that outlier, rather than for a group of bulls that convert efficiently.

As to the heifermates being easy keepers, that's a tough question. At this point in physiological development of animals, say from eight months to 12 months in age, perhaps. But, this may not hold true when that cow is put out on native range and asked to do a job as a working female. We may be trying to compare some things there that aren't necessarily alike.

Of course, with a lot of years of selection of high-gaining in our heifers, there's a possibility of displaying masculine traits. But, I think it has to be direct selection through the heifers rather than through the male herdmates.

***Carcass specification is a popular topic today. How can central testing contribute in our selection toward this set of traits?***

Since the inception of OBI, we've been providing information on ribeye area and fat thickness, for example, that if the producers had been using it, they would have their cattle ready for specification beef presently.

Producing specification beef, for the most part, depends on the breeder and where he wants to go and the markets created in the future from monetary benefits in having a certain kind of cattle.

***What should breeders and consignors remember about the central testing concept?***

The first thing they need to keep in mind is that the weaned calves brought to test are the weaned calves that are the top out of these people's herds, in most cases. They also need to remember that all cattle are not sold, only the best. Any number of things can happen-feet and leg problems, structural soundness, breeding soundness-any of these things can weed a bull out. If a bull comes from a producer where the genetic parentage is known and has met his equals and his superiors and has passed tests of structural soundness plus breeding soundness exams, he is meeting a heckuva lot of requirements.

Once a bull has come through the tests to the sale, he's an excellent prospect for sound breeding genetics.

Buyers should remember the stringent requirements these bulls have met across the board. For the most part, buyers can come and buy a bull with known genetic capabilities in the form of reliable pedigrees. Most test stations are reporting EPD from breed associations or through data from the central test. About 50 percent of our buyers at Oklahoma BEEF are repeat customers.

