



A Road Map to Buying Females

Are you looking to get started in the Angus business or are you wanting to expand your current herd? To help in the process we've developed some navigational tools for you.

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WALK, DON'T RUN — IT'S IMPORTANT NOT TO RUSH THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS.

Evaluate your resources

The first step is taking time to evaluate your inventory resources at hand. Examples of these resources include land, labor, finances and merchandising opportunities. This is a good time to sit down with your banker and do some financial planning.

Set goals

Develop short- and long-term goals for your farm or ranch. Determine what your objectives are — financial gain, lifestyle or family involvement.

If your operation is driven by economics, Ron Bolze, executive director of the Beef Improvement Federation (BIF), suggests developing production budgets. To get a handle on potential costs of production, become familiar with Standardized Performance Analysis (SPA) to document the costs of production, he says.

Be realistic-match your breeding program to your environment. For example, large-framed, heavy-milking cows would probably work in Wisconsin, but not in New Mexico. Determine what production traits are important to you. Possible traits include:

- ▼ birth weight and calving ease
- ▼ growth (weaning and yearling weight, mature size)
- ▼ maternal traits
- ▼ carcass characteristics
- ▼ functional traits (fleshing ability, udder quality, disposition, feet and legs)

What age?

When buying females age is an important factor to consider. In general, prime-age cows with

a proven track record (3 to 5 years old) represent the least risk. Most problems have been culled and they have most of their productive life ahead of them. They are closer to return on investment than an open or bred heifer with the first-time calving risk behind them. However, they tend to be more expensive.

Open or bred heifers represent the newest genetics available and you can more closely match targeted expected progeny differences (EPDs).

The benefits of buying replacement heifers instead of developing your own are first, it allows you to manage more mature cows, and second, you don't have to devote resources and money to heifer development.

In either case, as a producer you need to decide which age group fits best in your environment, management and labor resources.

Don Laughlin, regional manager

for the American Angus Association from Guilford, Mo., says the most often overlooked age group is 5-year-old cows and older. These females are proven so you know what they will do and they can usually be purchased for less money.



Individuals or groups?

Considering available resources and goals, decide the number of females to buy. Purchase as many as you need within your available resources. In some cases you're better off buying a few good cows that meet your criteria than lots of cattle that don't. In other words, if you were wanting to buy 20 females and found a group of 20 but only 10 fit your criteria, don't buy all 20.

If you're just starting in the purebred business, genetic variation can be reduced resulting in a more predictable end product if you buy a group of half-sisters. For example, identify which proven sire's daughters excel in targeted traits

and try to purchase a set of half-sisters usually produced through artificial insemination (AI). If you buy yearling heifers and breed them AI to the same calving-ease bull, these matings will result in three-quarter progeny.

Commercial bull buyers are showing great interest in buying half, three-quarter or even full-brothers produced by embryo transfer.

In other situations if you're just wanting to buy one or two females you can attend a production sale and purchase outstanding individual lots.

Finding a source

Don't just go out and buy — do your homework. Look for breeders with a proven track record of honest business relationships. Do not overlook less established breeders who haven't had sufficient time to prove themselves. Look for a breeder with a sound program that he or she stands behind. Take time to get to know the breeder's operation and goals.

Tools to use

When attending a production sale or visiting a farm or ranch to buy private treaty, what tools will you need to aid your selection process? Here is a list of tools that can help you in your quest for new genetics:

Pedigree information

Cattle with solid pedigrees with generation after generation of proven sires are the ones most sought after. Angus breeders have become pedigree conscientious because they've been burned with "faddish" cattle in the past. Unlike the 1940s, '50s and '60s, when pedigrees were hot due to stacking of Chicago

International champions, breeders today want pedigrees stacked with proven, no-nonsense genetics.

Before attending a production sale go through the sale catalogue and evaluate the pedigrees. Cross out those females which don't have an acceptable pedigree. Take the time to research sire lines with genetic defects or that have had production or reproduction problems. Consider sire lines recognized for fertility and longevity

If you are buying private treaty request that the breeder provide you with the pedigrees.

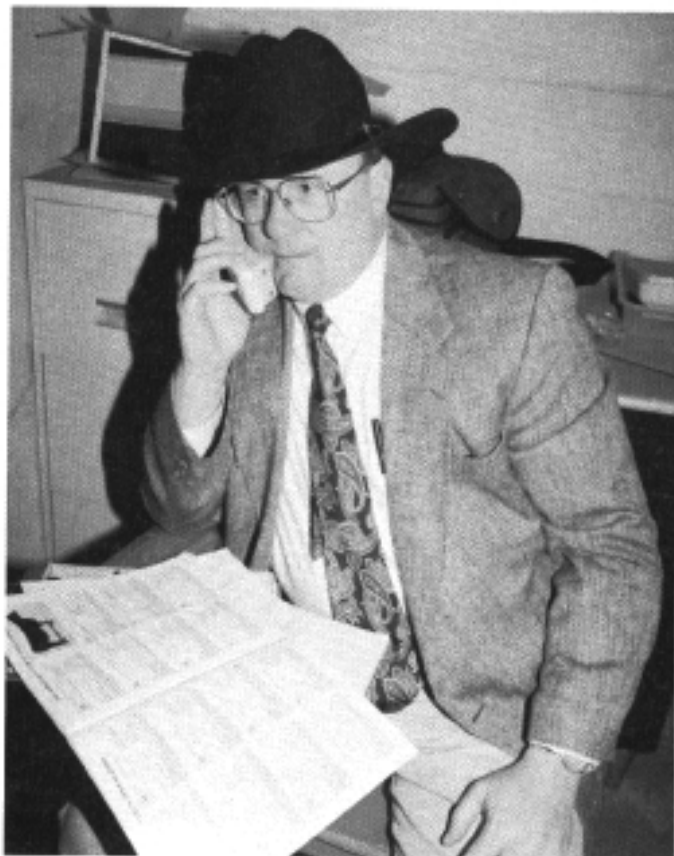
Performance

Along with pedigree comes performance. Females need to excel themselves as well as have workable EPDs. EPDs are a tool used to help predict the performance of an animal. Setting EPD parameters that will work in your breeding operation is important. When you set these parameters, be flexible; you can't always find a perfect combination. Performance traits to consider (EPDs and actual data) include:

- ▼ calving ease
- ▼ birth, weaning and yearling weights
- ▼ frame score
- ▼ milk
- ▼ scrotal circumference
- ▼ carcass traits

Eyeball

Phenotypic correctness is also important to consider. You want female to be structurally sound, have lots of capacity, powerful hips and sound feet and legs. If buying groups of heifers, uniformity is also important. Take note of the condition or body condition score of the females. Fat can hide faults.



Angus regional managers can help you find possible sources of new genetics. They can match a breeder wanting to get out of the business or wanting to cut back with someone wanting groups of heifers.

"Seedstock should be purchased from a program that provides an environment which allows cattle to express their genetic differences — not masked with a feed bucket," Bolze says.

Produce of dam

If buying older females, information on her lifetime productivity is important. Laughlin says the greatest tool available when buying cows is the produce of dam summary. Ask the breeder for a copy of this form. It contains information on:

1. pedigree
2. individual performance
3. individual EPDs
4. sire and dam EPDs
5. calving interval
6. offspring performance information — past matings and results

Questions to ask

Some important questions to ask when shopping for females are:

- ▼ breeder's herd health program and the incidence of disease
- ▼ terms of sale
- ▼ pregnancy diagnosis, including artificial insemination and natural exposure dates
- ▼ previous nutrition levels to determine fleshing ability

Buying females is not easy. It takes time and commitment if you want to find genetics that will fit your environment, goals, labor and resources. It comes down to personal preference. Using these tools can help you find the right genetics and lead you down the road to success.

