

Back to the Drawing Board

The debate continues on feasibility of across breed EPDs

Call it what you will — across breed or interbreed EPDs — the real debate among industry leaders is how to accurately compare expected progeny differences (EPDs) for all breeds with sire summaries.

Proponents believe that a table to directly compare EPDs across different breeds will be more user-friendly to commercial beef producers. Opponents argue that the current EPD research data base and comparison table, which was compiled by Dr. David Notter of Virginia Tech from U.S. Meat Animal Research Center (USMARC) data, is not up to date nor accurate enough to use. It has only a limited representative sample of bulls from some breeds and the tie to current sires in the breed sire summaries is questionable. In addition, this concept has never been evaluated for accuracy outside the boundaries of USMARC.

Across breed EPD discussion once again received attention at the 1990 Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) meeting in Ontario, Canada this past May. A standing-room only crowd participated in the genetic predictions committee meeting.

The first issue debated was the name itself. Committee chairman Dr. Larry Cundiff of USMARC expressed concern about the chance for confusion with across breed terminology. Interbreed was suggested as an alternative. No action was

taken, however.

The committee once again reviewed across breed EPD research conducted by Dr. Notter with the USMARC data.

Although the committee made positive progress towards a workable proposal, breed association leaders believe more research and evaluation is needed before making any commitments.

"We need to go back to the drawing board," says Richard Spader, executive vice president for the American Angus Association. Spader is current president of the U.S. Beef Breeds Council. "We place the highest priority on integrity and confidence of our individual breed sire evaluation reports. That same concern should exist in a report to compare breeds across the industry. Preliminary data isn't adequate in a comparison table that has this impact on the commercial and registered beef industry."

In summary, the U.S. Beef Breeds Council and BIF's genetic predictions committee supports the concept of across breed EPD research, subject to the following:

1. Greater efforts be made to add to the data base under consideration, which would be used to develop these predictions.
2. Research personnel, in cooperation with the BIF, continue to examine the

concept, evaluate the implications, and appraise the industry about the appropriate manner to interpret and utilize this information.

3. That no data be released until all breeds, who are members of the U.S. Beef Breeds Council with sire summaries, be examined for utilization, application and inclusion in the published reports.
4. The BIF develop appropriate industry guidelines for the uniform application of a methodology to produce across breed EPDs under the conditions cited in 1,2 and 3.

Getting the BIF genetic prediction committee's nod was a pilot study to project EPDs for all breeds using 1982 as the base year. This proposal calls for calculation of two sire summaries following the next data collection. One would use 1982 as a base year and the other would use each breed's current base year. Results would then be sent to breed associations for consideration and comparison.

This pilot study would allow breed associations to see how EPDs might change using a 1982 base year. It still must be approved, however, by the BIF board of directors and individual breed association boards.

Hoff Wins BIF Seedstock Award

South Dakota Angus breeder Doug Hoff received the National Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) Seedstock Producer of the Year award at the BIF convention in Ontario, Canada.

This award is presented to cattlemen who have made outstanding contributions to herd improvement.

Hoff and his wife, Molly, are owners of Scotch Cap Angus Ranch in Bison, SD. They currently run 250 head of registered Angus breeding cows. All cows are bred by artificial insemination; 10 percent are used in an embryo transplant program.

Hoff believes selecting quality seedstock cattle requires examining performance records that contain individual ratings, dam summaries and pelvic and scrotal measurements.

"The Angus breed has an extremely progressive program," he says. "We use their estimated progeny differences (EPDs) and all available performance information when selecting sires."

Total reproductive efficiency is one of Hoff's main priorities when selecting replacement females. Calving intervals, pelvic measurements, weaning and yearling EPDs, structural scores, and maternal, birth and milk EPDs are all evaluated.

Hoff's performance program emphasis is changing from 205- and 365-day weights to reproductive efficiency and edible lean meat per day of age. Recording carcass data on all herd bulls is also a priority. This breeder is striving to produce genetic lines that will be competitive with pork and poultry on an efficiency basis.

Performance testing is the best and only yardstick we have to measure the efficiency of beef production, according to Hoff.

Fifteen Hoff-bred bulls are currently involved in various national sire evaluation programs. In 1988, both the top-rated nonparent bull at yearling weight and the top-rated nonparent female were from Hoff-bred bulls.

Other Angus breeders nominated for the 1990 BIF Seedstock Producer award were Bob Thomas Family, Baker, Ore.; Richard Janssen, Ellsworth, Kan.; T.D. & Roger Steele, Daleville, Va.; Dr. Burleigh Anderson, Loysville, Pa.; Larry Earhart, Powell, Wyo.; and Steve Forrester, West Plains, Mo.