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Beef cattle shows are changing.

You won't notice the difference at most shows this year, but the trend seems to be to use more performance information in cattle show judging with the goal of making shows more educational and useful to the beef cattle industry.

Speaking at the 1989 National Angus Conference in Athens, Ga., Bill Pope challenged the industry to figure out ways to use Expected Progeny Differences (EPDs) in cattle show judging. It seems that we have been moving in that direction ever since.

The American Angus Association Board of Directors, in a long-range planning meeting last February in Kansas City, adopted as one of their four long-term goals that of making shows more relevant to the beef industry. One consideration was using EPDs, or other objective measures, along with visual evaluation. This is not totally new to the industry because some measures like weight and weight per day of age have been made available at Angus shows for years.

With all due credit, the American Polled Hereford Association took the lead with their Genetic Focus event at the 1990 American Royal in Kansas City. This comprehensive judging system, using EPDs and other objective information, was very successful. It will be used evidently in a few future shows and, no doubt, will contribute to the development of similar type shows in other breeds.

Two Angus shows this month will introduce performance classes. These are the American Angus Breeders' Futurity in Louisville, Ky., and the California State Fair Angus Show in Sacramento.

The Futurity will have an educational demonstration show for three classes of heifers, based somewhat on the Genetic Focus system. Three judges will rank the heifers using performance and visual evaluation. Included will be the EPDs from Angus Herd Improvement Records plus frame score, fat thickness and ribeye area per hundred pounds.

The visual ranking will be based upon structural soundness, feet, mobility, capacity, muscling, breed character, sex character and general eye appeal. These cattle may also be

entered in the open show.

The California State Fair Angus Show will be called a Performance Bull Jackpot Class. It will not include cattle entered in the open show. It's aimed at attracting exhibitors who normally sell to the commercial bull market and who don't exhibit Angus otherwise.

These cattle will be washed, have their heads and bellies clipped and must be broke to lead. Otherwise they will not be fitted. They will be evaluated on their "appropriateness to range condition" and ranked by a composite placing of three judges based upon performance records and visual appraisal.

Don't look for this type of show to replace regular shows any time soon, but they do bring new ideas and add science to the traditional practice of beef cattle show ring evaluation. However, many shows may initiate performance classes over the next few years.

The procedures will, no doubt, introduce some breeders to performance records and help show how to use them to evaluate cattle according to their particular needs. It could be particularly important as an educational tool for young people and new breeders.

Those of us who deal with EPDs every day tend to forget that thousands of cattle producers don't have even an elementary knowledge of them, let alone know how to use them to select superior seedstock. This was pointed out rather graphically in the recent Texas Tech survey of commercial cattle producers reported at the 1991 National Angus Conference in Austin, Texas. Only about 40 percent of commercial cattle producers said they used EPDs in their selection of seedstock.

Many registered breeders, too, need a better understanding of performance records and their importance in breeding and marketing seedstock. Less than 3,000 members of the American Angus Association, out of a total of some 16,500 active adult members, are enrolled in the AHIR program and keep performance records, even though they account for a large percentage of registrations.

Next opportunity you get, take a look at a performance class or a performance show. You may be getting a glimpse of the show ring of the future.

