

Believing in the Value of Angus



Comparing the data. Bill and Barb Rishel of Rishel Angus, North Platte, Neb., use carcass data received from the Certified Angus Beef Program to select sires for their breeding program.

Building alliances for the future, Bill and Barb Rishel of Rishel Angus are involved in structured sire evaluation in cooperation with the American Angus Association and Certified Angus Beef Program. For years the Rishels had been collecting performance data. Then in the 1980s they added another step, the collection of data on the end product.

"We believed there was a value in the testing," Bill says, "but until the last year or two no one paid for it."

A group of breeders

interested in the same goal of identifying carcass merit in cattle joined in a partnership with Bishels.

"Whatever success we have we owe to those people who work in a cooperative effort with us," Bill says.

Currently in an alliance with Rishel Angus is Box Butte Angus, Alliance, Neb.; Maassen Brothers, North Platte, Neb.; Millbar Angus, Wanneta, Neb.; and Mill Iron Ranches Saratoga, Wyo. They work closely together on the testing and collection of data on sires owned jointly

between herds, or ones produced in one of the individual programs.

"If a bull hits in one of the programs we have an agreement to allow the use of the bull in the other herds at cost," Rishel says. "It spreads risk and reward."

In 1995 more than 370 head will be slaughtered between the five herds. The animals are fed at several locations but ownership is retained and data is obtained at slaughter.

"In the last two years we have identified six bulls

positive for marbling and ribeye," he says.

Their alliance has received data on 279 head. Of that group 44 percent qualified for the CAB Program with an average Choice or better quality grade and a Yield Grade of 3.99 or better. The national average is 17 percent. At less than 15 months of age, 89 percent graded Choice and Prime, with the industry average being 55 percent. Out of the group 74 percent were U.S. Yield Grade 1 and 2. They also had two sire groups with more than 80 percent qualify for the CAB Program.

The data received indicates the Bishels and their partners are moving in the right direction, preparing for the future with use of carcass data collection and evaluation.

The Rishels, originally from Pennsylvania, moved to Nebraska in 1975 to be in the heart of cattle country. "We wanted to move to a commercial trade area and raise bulls for the commercial industry," Bill says. They have built their herd to 240 head of registered Angus females.

"Our goal is the same with carcass data as it is with any performance traits – to offer bulls to commercial cattle producers that have the absolute maximum amount of optimum performance. We are trying to produce consistent bulls for our customers," Bill says.

The Bishels are incorporating the use of carcass EPDs in their breeding program. A majority of their '95 calf crop have interim carcass EPDs.

When selecting sires the Rishels evaluate bulls on birth, growth and milk traits in addition to the carcass traits they look for. They're trying to use bulls in a limited and narrow field, balanced in performance and maternal traits as well as carcass merit.

"We are not using high carcass bulls that let us down in other areas. We are insisting they have strengths in other areas," Bill says.

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— Bill Rishel

If data from a tested bull has the right numbers in the areas they want they will continue to use him in the herd. They try not to AI their cows to new bulls each year. Their goal is to stack pedigrees with the traits they want.

"When we find bulls that are doing things right, we use them for up to a three-year period," Bill says. "We are trying to build consistency and uniformity in our cow herd with daughters."

Next year the replacement heifers will have offspring that are three generations deep in carcass merit.

Some progressive commercial cattle producers are demanding carcass information. "It's important to listen to those extra progressive cattlemen who have a handle on the economics of their operation," Bill says.

When marketing their bulls this spring, the Rishels used ultrasound data to complement their interim carcass EPDs.

Collecting data has some value today, but it's still too early to reap the benefits of the effort. Bill believes it's the direction cattle producers have to go.

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Quality performance and carcass merit traits are important in herd we selection at Rishel Angus

PERFORMANCE GLOSSARY

Accuracy (ACC): The reliability placed on the expected progeny difference (EPD). An accuracy of close to 14 indicates higher reliability.

Carcass evaluation: Techniques of measuring components of quality and quantity in carcasses.

Carcass merit: Desirability of carcass relative to quantity of components (muscle, fat and bone), USDA quality grade plus eating qualities.

Carcass quality grade: An estimate of palatability based primarily on marbling and maturity and generally to a lesser extent on color, texture and firmness of lean.

Contemporary group: A group of cattle approximately the same age and given equal treatment...

Dressing percent: (Chilled carcass weight/live weight) x 100

Expected Progeny Difference (EPD): The estimate of how future progeny of each animal are expected to perform in each of the traits listed. EPD is expressed in pound either plus or minus. EPDs are calculated through the National Cattle Evaluation.

Hot carcass weight: Weight of carcass just prior to chilling.

Interim EPD: Is a calculation made at the American Angus Association for animals with records processed between semi-annual National Cattle Evaluations. Basically, interim EPD considers the EPD of the sire, EPD of the dam and the individual record of the calf. Normally when two of these three elements are present an interim EPD can be generated.

Marbling: The specks of fat (intramuscular fat) distributed in muscular tissue. Marbling is usually evaluated in the ribeye between 12th and 13th rib.

National Cattle Evaluation: Programs of cattle evaluation conducted by breed associations to genetically compare animals. Carefully conducted national cattle evaluation programs give unbiased estimates of expected progeny differences (EPDs). Cattle evaluations are based on field data and rely on information from the individual animal, relatives and progeny to calculate EPDs.

Ribeye area: Area of the longissimus muscle measured in square inches at the 12th rib interface on the beef forequarter.

USDA Yield Grade: Measurements of carcass cutability categorized into numerical categories with 1 being the leanest and 5 being the fattest. Yield Grade and cutability are based on the same four carcass traits.