



# Beef Logic

► by R.A. "Bob" Long

## Advertisements require knowledgeable interpretation

*An advertisement is designed to attract public attention by emphasizing the desirable qualities of a product, thereby stimulating sales. In general, there are two types of ads used in the beef seedstock industry:*

*(1) ads that declare the breeding stock or semen superior in every way, but offer no support for the claims (Obviously, such ads deserve little attention.); and*

*(2) ads that offer a glowing description of what is for sale and support these claims with performance records and expected progeny differences (EPDs).*

### A problem

The majority of seedstock ads fall into the second category; but, therein lies a problem. In many instances the performance data presented do not support the claims of superiority. This fact points out the need for thorough, knowledgeable interpretation of performance information.

Examples of the problem above occur regularly in the *Angus Journal*. This is particularly true in the case of carcass data. For example, a typical ad might state, "Super Bull — the ideal bull for carcass improvement." However, examination of the carcass data shows not a single EPD value much above breed average.

Just because the EPDs for marbling, ribeye area and retail product are positive and fat is negative does not mean that a bull is a "carcass bull." The deviation from breed average must be sizable if worthwhile improvement is to be accomplished. A bull must rank high in the breed for all carcass traits to be considered a "carcass bull."

### Incomplete

Another dilemma in performance advertising is incomplete data. Unfortunately, some advertisers choose to include only the "good stuff." Intelligent breeding stock selection includes the consideration of EPDs for every performance trait, along with the accuracy estimate of each and the number of herds and progeny from which the data came. If the data is incomplete, it is best to proceed with caution.

Conflicting data are of particular concern in view of the recent tendency to report both progeny test carcass information and ultrasound data. It is not uncommon to find these two measures in disagreement.

Therefore, it is particularly important to analyze the data carefully.

A recent ad made reference to "outstanding carcass data." Both progeny test data EPDs and ultrasound EPDs were presented. The progeny test data was outstanding, showing considerable reduction in fat and a high percent retail product (%RP), while the ultrasound information was positive for fat and zero for %RP. Further examination revealed only nine progeny in two herds for the carcass EPDs and 36 progeny in eight herds for ultrasound. The ad should have read, "Don't use this bull if you want carcass improvement."

### Information source

An important decision for cattle breeders is whether to use actual carcass data or ultrasound EPDs. The evidence overwhelmingly favors ultrasound. Acquiring actual carcass progeny test data is very expensive and time-consuming, and it can only be obtained on a few animals in a herd. The ancestry and genetic potential of

the dams are unknown, and the carcass measurements are subjective. Ultrasound data is relatively inexpensive and immediately available, all animals in the herd are measured, and the measurements are more accurate.

Furthermore, the size of the American Angus Association's ultrasound data bank assures more effective breed improvement. The Association currently has carcass data on about 50,000 carcasses gathered over the past 27 years, while ultrasound data involves almost 300,000 registered Angus measured since Jan. 1, 1999.

### Shop smart

The selection of the bull to sire next year's calf crop is a very important one. Advertising can be helpful in identifying prospects. However, analyze the performance data carefully and make the final decision only after thorough investigation.

Find the latest copy of the national *Sire Evaluation Report*, study the first few pages in order to understand the meaning, and examine all the data. Finally, get an up-to-date copy of the performance pedigree for further study.

Compare the prospects for completeness of information, balance, accuracy and the number of progeny and herds from which the data came. Consider the shortcomings of your cow herd. Ideally, one should make a visual examination of the sire as well, but this is not always possible.

Finally, after careful selection, use your choice confidently and extensively. A common mistake is the use of too many unrelated bulls. Using 10 or 12 bulls on a hundred cows is not a breeding program, and it accomplishes very little.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Bob Long'.

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