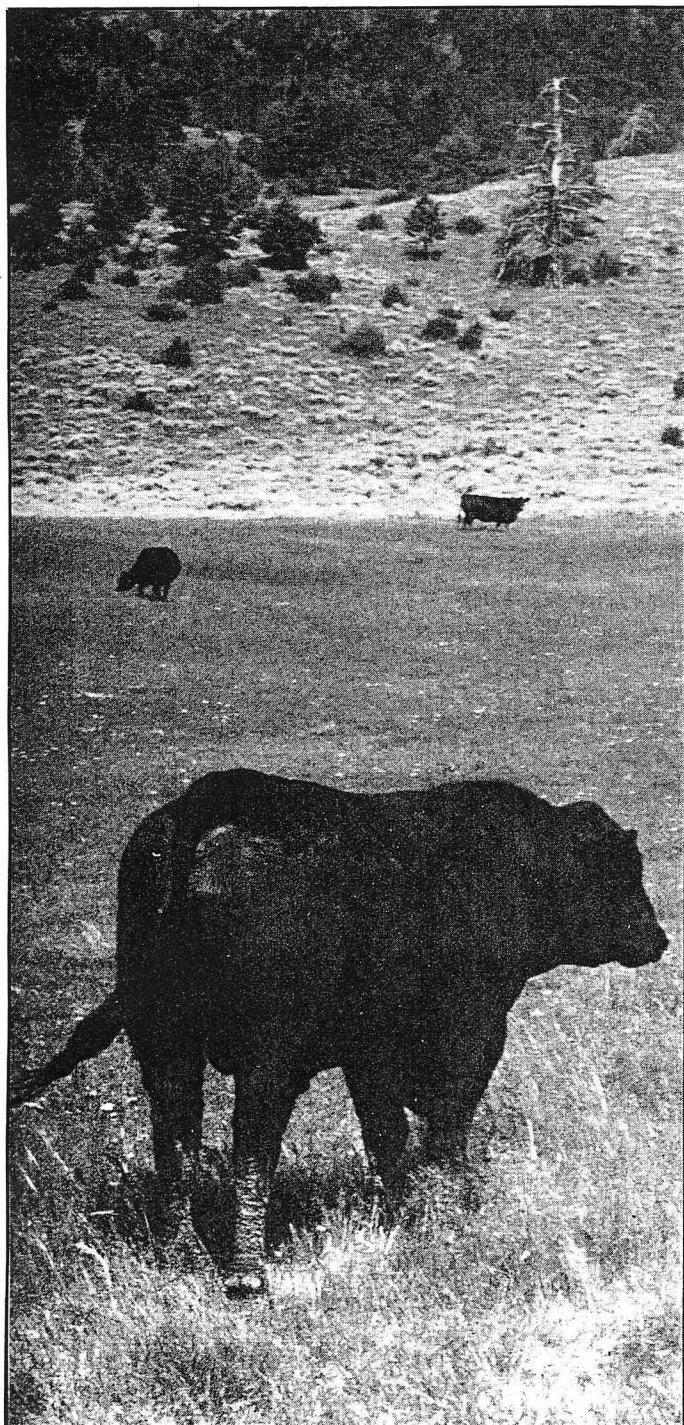


"Commercial cattlemen need all the information and data available in order to make sound profitable decisions on herd sire selection and female replacements. Some seed stock producers are providing an ample amount of performance information, but the majority of them are not."

# Your Commercial Customer- What He Needs



Al Smith

When Al Smith of Neuhoff Farms, Inc., Roanoke, Va., said that, then told those attending last spring's Beef Improvement Federation meeting what a commercial breeder wants when he's buying a bull, he spoke with the kind of authority gained through experience. Smith, who has spent the last 10 years managing Neuhoff's extensive cow-calf operation, purchases in the neighborhood of 30-35 bulls a year to maintain the 170-head herd bull battery. (Neuhoff runs 2,800 breeding-age females.) Since the southwest Virginia firm's program is one of extensive crossbreeding, the bulls represent 12 different breeds. All of them, Smith says, must be performance tested.

Neuhoff is involved, incidentally, in the American Angus Assn.'s sire evaluation program; during the spring 1981 breeding season the firm tested seven bulls and used two Reference Sires.

First, Smith showed his audience the results of a survey of 400 cow-calf operators taken by Miller Research Service during May and June 1980. He explained that geographic locations of those contacted followed the population density of beef cows in the U.S. reasonably well.

1. How many brood cows do you have?	10-49	133
	50-99	126
	100-199	99
	200-499	32
	500 Plus	10
2. Have you purchased any bulls in the past 12 months?	Yes	167
	No	233
3. How many bulls did you buy last year?	1	73
	2	51
	3 or 4	24
	5 or More	19
4. Did you buy a registered bull?	Yes	126
	No	29
	Some Were, Some Not	12

5. Is a registration certificate an indicator of:

	Quality	Dependability	Performance
Yes	55%	57%	56%
No	40%	35%	39%
Don't Know	5%	8%	5%

6. What else does a registration certificate tell you?

Parentage and Bloodlines	55%
Nothing	32%
Purebred	11%
Gain	3%

7. Are these traits important?

	Fertility	Growth	Carcass Quality	Ease of Calving	Temperament
Yes	30%	35%	9%	21%	2%
Yes, After Discussion	68%	64%	84%	76%	88%
No	2%	1%	7%	3%	10%

8. Where do you prefer to buy bulls?

Production Sales	15%
Consignment Sales	3%
Private Treaty	70%
No Preference	12%

9. What items are important to you when buying a bull?

Rate of Gain	51%
Weaning Weight	20%
Parentage and Bloodlines	18%
Past Performance	13%
Birth Weight	11%
Appearance	9%
Nothing	8%
Records	6%
Fertility	5%
Calving Ease	4%
Breeder Reputation	2%

10. Do the breeders you buy from provide this information?

Yes	81%
No	10%
Don't Know	9%

11. If you were to decide on the basis of one item only, where to buy your bull, which of these would it be?

Breeder Reputation	57%
Performance Data	31%
Available Supply	8%
No Opinion	4%

12. Are you a commercial producer?

Yes	53%
No	47%

13. Do you performance test?

Yes	23%
No	77%

14. Do you raise only registered cattle?

Yes	14%
No	86%

15. Do you utilize a terminal cross?

Yes	27%
No	73%

16. What more could registered breeders do to help the commercial producer?

Nothing	33%
Production Records	20%
Don't Know	19%
Better Quality Cattle	11%
Performance Test	6%
Rate of Gain	5%
Less Pampering	1%
Larger Size	1%
Reduce Price	1%

After showing his audience these figures, Smith expressed his opinions, which follow.

There are several facts that stand out in this survey:

**1. Breeder reputation or breeder credibility.** If this is not established, then all other information is useless. I cannot buy a herd sire based on information that is suspect. If seed stock pro-

ducers do not conduct their sales and business with honesty and integrity, then they cannot be relied on for accurate information.

**2. Fertility.** Commercial cattlemen must have available to them several facts pertaining to fertility:

A. Scrotal circumference. This is an easily obtained measurement that is very important to total sperm production. At a recent national breed bull show, 25% of the bulls shown did not meet minimum scrotal circumference standards. These animals were in the wrong show. They should have been in the steer show. Commercial cattlemen need to know this kind of bull gets castrated instead of paraded around pretending to be a bull.

B. Ejaculation and semen study. More work is involved here, but a bull that has been tested is worth more money to me. Most bulls are guaranteed to be breeders when they are purchased and most breeders will make them good if they aren't. However, I can never make up lost time if cows are not bred when I discover a bull is infertile.

C. Reproductive organs should be examined for abnormalities before a bull is ever sold. Here again is a simple process that can keep a bad bull from being purchased.

**3. Ease of calving.** Birth weights should be recorded and made available on every bull that is ever sold. Big birth weights are not bad when they are known. I can select my bulls to use on different ages and breeds of cows if I know birth weights. This way I can decrease my chances of calving difficulty and benefit from larger birth weights rather than suffer losses because of them.

**4. Growth, weaning weight, rate of gain and yearling weight.** I will lump these into one group. This information needs to be available in order to select for specific needs. My weaning weights may be okay, but I might need to improve rate of gain or yearling weights and can do so by selecting bulls with these traits.

**5. Carcass information.** This is important to some commercial cattlemen who sell their beef on the rail. There are currently several breed associations that are doing excellent work in this area, and I hope they continue to do so.

There is also a lot of information which is important to commercial herds in female selection. It is my opinion that reproduction and performance records should be kept on all females. At Neuhoff Farms, we breed our heifers for two heat periods and our cows for three. After a pregnancy test, we cull all open females. A cow that does not raise a calf every 365 days is not profitable to us.

I also feel that calving ease records are very important. I have heard Dave Nichols say on several occasions that Nichols cows calve by themselves or die trying. We need to have more seed stock producers adopt this philosophy so calving difficulty is not passed on to commercial herds.

#### Predictable Performance

Now you take all this information and data and put it together and you have what James Bennett (owner and manager of Red House test station in Virginia) calls predictable performance: Cow No. 207 is nine years old. Her weaning and yearling ratios on seven calves are 105 and 106. One of her daughters has five calves with ratios of 110 and 111; one of her granddaughters has three calves with ratios of 115 and 116. By breeding these cattle to top performance bulls, he can predict the performance of their offspring. Thus, he has taken some of the gamble out of raising cattle.

The commercial cattle producers who survive the 1980s will be the ones who get what they pay for. We don't mind paying for a good bull, but we want to be sure it is a profitable bull. The bitterness of poor quality remains long after the sweetness of low price is forgotten.

We must be able to produce our product as efficiently and cheaply as possible. Already the chickenburger is, and soon the porkburger will be, making inroads into the consumption of hamburger. It is going to be hard for the beef industry to regain this loss unless we are competitive in price.

Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored, and the facts are that the cattlemen who survive the 1980s are going to be the ones who use the total performance package. We are going to survive. Are you?