

# Beef Logic

by Bob Long



## Performance Record Reporting Procedures are Important

Beef cattle performance records and the expected progeny differences (EPDs) computed from those records are a major asset of the beef industry. Every breed association has installed such a program or is in the process of developing one.

Angus breeders are fortunate that the leadership in their chosen breed recognized the value of such a system early on and this wisdom has endowed the Angus breed with the world's largest and most comprehensive beef performance data bank.

Seedstock producers have recognized the value of performance records in both selection and marketing resulting in almost universal consideration of EPDs in breeding decisions. This wide usage of performance information is certainly positive for the beef industry. Still breeders should realize the procedures they themselves use in collecting and reporting performance data impacts the effectiveness of selection in their herd and throughout the breed.

For example, inaccurate reporting of data can result in misleading interim EPDs leading to extensive use of a genetically inferior young sire. Such an error not only reduces the genetic value of the herds unfortunate to have used this bull, but can damage the reputation of the herd that produced him as well. Also, improper data reporting can result in failure to identify a genetically superior individual.

Probably the greatest source of error in performance data is improper contemporary grouping. A contemporary group is a group of cattle of the same breed, of the same sex, born at the same place, at the same time and they and their dams treated alike until the time of performance measurement.

The goal of performance testing is to measure the genetic differences between individuals. A calf's performance is a combination of its genetics and its environment. Therefore, to measure genetic differences cattle must be exposed to the same environment, hence the importance of reporting performance data in proper contemporary groups.

A common error in contemporary grouping results from differences in plane of nutrition due to variation in pasture and/or supplemental feeding.

In pasture situations both quality and quantity of forage influences the milk production of cows which obviously affects the weaning weight of calves. Likewise, weaning weights are impacted by the pasture consumed directly by the calves. Therefore, wide differences in nutrition occur on the same ranch or farm due to variation in plant species, soil type, fertilization, stocking rate and even rainfall.

The supplemental feeding of both cows and their calves greatly affects performance. Creep fed calves cannot be grouped with those receiving no creep. Further, creep fed calves from different pastures may consume different amounts of feed due to feeder location, feeder space, feeder type or freshness of feed.

Of course, variation in level of protein, energy or any nutrient in the feed is in error. Likewise, cows should be wintered alike and go to spring grass at the same time in order for the performance records of their calves to be grouped together legitimately.

Another source of error in contemporary grouping is age. The less range in age within a group the better, and it should never exceed 90 days. Adjustment for age is a part of every performance record program but the less adjustment necessary the better.

Sex is another variable to consider. Among genetically similar cattle, bulls grow faster than steers and steers faster than heifers. If you really want to mix sexes in order to have weaning ratios it can be done but breeding value is expressed by EPDs and is much more valuable than ratios.

There should be no steers in seedstock herds. If calves are steered before weaning it means that the breeder is not using performance records for selection but has made a culling decision on visual appraisal alone. Bulls should be culled only after post weaning gain test if complete performance records are to be maintained.

Proper contemporary grouping requires good management and attention to detail. The extra effort pays dividends in more effective selection in every breeder's herd and chosen breed.

### Silveira Brothers Bull Tops Test At West Hills College

Silveira Brothers Angus, Mendota, Calif., had the high indexing bull over all breeds in the 1996 West Hills Community College Bull Test at Coalinga, reports test coordinator Robert Britton.

The bull, Silveira's Tark, had an average daily gain of 4.75 pounds a day over the 16-week feeding period. The bull's weight per day of age was 3.98 pounds.

The recently completed test included 108 bulls of a variety of breeds. All were born between Jan. 1 and May 31, 1995. The ration fed was 70 percent roughage and 30 percent concentrate. Despite high grain costs, the average cost per pound of gain for the entire test was from 56 to 59 cents a pound.

Complete details of the test, as well as information on the 1997 test, are available from Robert Britton at West Hills College, (209) 934-3081.

