



Angus Stakes

► by *Shauna Rose Hermel*, editor

It's not a race for the extreme

I had a discussion recently with a seedstock producer bemoaning the thought of an additional expected progeny difference (EPD) — another number to lessen the value of his sale offering until he could establish competitive numbers in his herd.

It's matchmaking

The race for the highest is a game producers invented to gain a marketing edge, not the reason why EPDs and dollar value indexes (\$Values) were created. Genetic predictions were created to describe the cattle so producers could utilize the best “numbers profile” to fit their situation.

Realistically, there is no value in having the highest yearling weight (YW) EPD bull unless the herd of cows he will be used on needs to greatly improve in yearling weight. It may be a detriment to a herd that retains heifers, as the bull may sire heifers that will have a larger cow size and thus cost more to feed.

There is no extra value in buying the bull with the highest calving ease direct (CED) EPD unless the buyer has been experiencing calving problems. Seeking the extreme in high CED can result in giving up pounds of performance and spending a lot of extra cash on a trait that may offer a lot of value to some producers, but not to you.

For years the industry has preached moderation — look for the optimum, not the

maximum. Yet optimum is hard to define.

I would love to put up a set of numbers and say this is the “numbers profile” that is optimum — values higher or lower have less value. Reality dictates that there is no one optimum set of numbers because what works on Midwest fescue doesn't necessarily match what works in the Intermountain West. Goals may be far different for a herd selling calves at weaning than for a herd that retains ownership.

Buyers and sellers alike have to keep in mind that the value of a bull's EPD profile is based on where that profile will move the herd he's used on and whether his calves create more return or less return within the market that establishes their value.

Beef value (\$B), for example, has less value to a customer selling calves at weaning than it does to the customer retaining ownership through the feedyard. Weaned calf value (\$W) has less value to the producer who buys replacement heifers and retains ownership through the feedyard.

It is harder to sell optimums because

optimums require understanding the buyer's needs. Does the buyer need yearling weight? Does the buyer need greater calving ease, or would weaning weight be of more importance to his/her bottom line?

In an ideal world, the customer has measures of their cow herd to benchmark where they are now and where they need to go. That makes evaluating the EPD profile of potential herd sires much easier because you can emphasize the traits that need pushing and worry less about those that just need to be maintained.

We regularly publish stories showing great examples of seedstock producers who develop relationships with their customers to help match purchases to needs.

In the broader fabric of the industry, we have to count on the marketplace to match needs with bulls for sale, and that requires the seller advertising what he/she has and the seller sorting through the advertisements to find a bull to fit their need. When we do have an “extreme,” chances are the person to whom that bull has the most value is not going to be within your normal clientele. It makes perfect sense to advertise the extreme to try to match him with the perfect buyer.

If I had a bull with an extreme \$B, I'd promote him as such to make sure those producers who need extreme \$B could find him and I could be paid his full value. The bread and butter of the industry, however, is not in the extremes, but in matching seedstock to customer needs.

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