

Sire Profit Analysis Maps Herd Improvement

Benchmarking data from your herd against data from others in the same environment or feeding group can be a powerful tool.

by **Lyndee Stabel**, Certified Angus Beef LLC

You can't put a price on family, friends, beautiful sunsets or rainbows, but today's technology and tools show the specific dollar impacts of cattle business decisions that were once only roughly estimated.

Iowa's Tri-County Steer Carcass Futurity (TCSCF) began in 1982 as a means of helping producers capture the value of improved genetics, health and management. Those with high-quality cattle soon realized they could improve their returns by using the feedlot and carcass data to guide future decisions.

The level of detail in TCSCF data is unsurpassed in the cattle-feeding industry, available to all producers, and uniquely customized to each one. The cooperative's Sire Profit Analysis report (www.tscf.com/2012_Sire_Profit_Observation_Correlation_Final_Ver_.pdf) shows a profit value for sires of calves entered in the program. It has grown from showing data on 35 sires in 2003 to 3,451 sires in 2012.

Daryl Strohbehn helped develop TCSCF while an Extension beef specialist at Iowa State University. Remaining active in retirement, he continues to analyze the collected data and compile the Sire Profit Analysis and other

benchmark reports because, he says, it is important and satisfying work.

"To make things work in the cattle business today, it takes information based on sound data," Strohbehn says. "I enjoy figuring out what that sound data is and what it might tell us."

Putting the data to use

The Kleeman family appreciates the value of such information, as it relies heavily on cattle for a livelihood.

Matt Kleeman works with his father and three brothers on their commercial Angus and farming operation near Braymer, Mo. Together, they own 350 spring-calving and 140 fall-calving cows, entering calves in TCSCF for nearly 10 years to gain the information that can improve those herds.

"It's hard to tell just by looking at the bull on foot how it's going to do as a sire," Kleeman says. That's true whether the sire is in a photograph or a local pasture.

All the heifers and some cows on the Kleeman operation are bred using artificial insemination (AI). Even with the higher level of proven genetics among AI sires, the family aims to verify the impact of expected progeny

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differences (EPDs) by looking at actual progeny differences from their cows.

That's why they carefully pick sires they believe will perform best with their cows, then use the system available to check on results. Of all the sires evaluated in the Sire Profit Analysis last year, the Kleemans had some ranking from the 99th profit percentile down to the 10th profit percentile.

"You may think a bull is doing a good job, but it may not do as well in the sire report or vice versa," Kleeman says. "The Sire Profit Analysis ranks our bulls and tells us more about the carcass and feeding qualities of their calves."

That's especially important because the Kleemans keep replacement breeding stock and can multiply positive results while culling lines that show less profit potential.

Making adjustments

Breeding decisions for the next season are simplified with these results. In 2013 for example, the producers bred more females to one of their top-performing sires based on information from the report. They apply the information broadly and specifically.

"Even though that summary tells us what the sire is doing, we can still trace that calf back to the maternal side, as well," Kleeman says. Data serves as a sorting tool for choosing replacement heifers and helps find the sire traits that best match their cows. If a calf crop does not perform as expected, they know to adjust the breeding to find a better combination.

By making changes on both the male and female sides, the herds keep advancing



PHOTO BY STEVE SUTHER

► Mike Kleeman works with his father and three brothers, including twin brother Matt, on their commercial Angus and farming operation near Braymer, Mo.

on the goals of improving yield grades and garnering more quality premiums such as those for the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand. That adds more value to the carcasses, thanks in large part to information from TCSCF, Kleeman says.

“If we didn’t have the data back on our sires and retained ownership calves, we would not know which direction to go to improve our herd to become more efficient and profitable,” he notes.

The right sires will add value to any herd, but years of work on the Sire Profit Analysis project have shown Strohbehn there is no specific type of bull or breeding formula that guarantees the most profit.

However, one report compares traits of the top 25% to the bottom 25% profit bulls, and there are some common traits typically found in the top group, Strohbehn says.

“They tend to gain a little faster, have higher quality grades, higher CAB percentages, and higher percentages of USDA Prime,” he explains. “But there’s a lot of variation to how those bulls look within both the high- and low-percentile-range groups.”

Some of the best bulls may have exceptionally high quality grades but below-average growth, he explains. Others may have perfect health with high gain potential but below-average quality.



PHOTO COURTESY OF DARYL STROHBEHN

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Many cattle operations across North America have benefitted from TCSCF, but Strohbehn says more producers could gain from participation — especially those who assume their cattle are average in every trait.

“That is a mistake,” he emphasizes. “Collecting your own herd data and

benchmarking it against data from others in the same environment or feeding group is a very powerful tool. It shows your herd’s strengths and weaknesses and can help build a roadmap for improvement.”

With detailed profit values and a full range of performance information from TCSCF, the map is getting easier to follow.



Editor’s Note: Lyndee Stabel is a freelance writer for *Certified Angus Beef LLC*.