

Snake River Bull Test

Filling a need for bull producers and buyers in the West.

Story & photo by **Kindra Gordon**, field editor



Ten years ago Jason Anderson envisioned establishing a bull test in south-central Idaho to be called the Snake River Bull Test. He called his friend Ben Eborn to share the idea. Ironically, Ben — who was just returning from the Midland Bull Test — had a similar vision.

The two, who had gone to school together at Ricks College and the University of Idaho, combined forces and began developing their plan and talking to producers who might be interested in being consignors or buyers.

Of their bull test idea, Anderson explains they wanted to provide cattlemen in the West, particularly those with smaller herd numbers, a better way to market. “There hadn’t been a bull test in Idaho for several years, and we recognized there was a need for one,” says Anderson.

Three years ago, in October 2013, their vision became reality and they received the first group of bulls to be on test — 132 bulls from consignors in Idaho and surrounding states.

In 2016, the Snake River Bull Test completed its third group of bulls on test — 165 head, with their annual bull test sale taking place March 4 at the Jerome County Fairgrounds offering 120 top-quality bulls.

Realistic logistics

Bulls on test are fed at Schaeffer Farms; Anderson and Eborn rent facility space from them and the Schaeffer team provides the day-to-day feeding of the bulls. Jim Lamb with McNess works with Anderson and

Eborn to develop the feed ration for the bulls.

Anderson notes that their location for the test in south-central Idaho offers several benefits. They are located along I-84 for easy access; it’s the “banana belt” region of the state, offering good weather; and they also have good access to feedstuffs.

“We’ve had great support from producers in Idaho, but also from producers in surrounding states,” he says, crediting that to the central, easy-to-access location for the test.

Suited to the job

Anderson and Eborn also have backgrounds that have made them well-suited to operating a bull test and working with producers.

Anderson and his wife and four children own and operate a registered fall-calving Angus herd near Jerome. He has worked extensively in the artificial insemination (AI) industry in the Northwest and consults with cattlemen about genetics and breeding protocols. He is the owner of Rocky Mountain Ultrasound & Genetics, which collects carcass data, and he is also a sales representative for Alta Beef.

Eborn’s day job is with the University of Idaho Extension System, specializing in the areas of farm and ranch management, marketing, crop production economics, and farm succession and estate planning. He and his wife and their eight children have a registered-Angus herd they manage in Teton Valley and Bear Lake Valley.

Both men and their families have a passion for the beef industry. Through their experiences and relationships with ranchers across the West, they are dedicated to assisting ranchers in selling high-quality bulls, as well as providing commercial cattlemen opportunities to buy tested bulls from several cowmen in one location.

“We are excited that the bull test has come together and gotten so much support from consignors,” Anderson says. He adds that having repeat consignors has been a testament that he and Eborn feel they are on the right path.

Three-trait focus

One of the things Anderson and Eborn emphasize about the Snake River Bull Test is that it is not a growth-only test. They are focused on selecting bulls that excel in three profit-driven traits: growth, maternal and carcass.

“All three of those traits are what puts money into cattlemen’s pockets,” says Anderson as he explains why they focus on all three.

Growth considers average daily gain (ADG), weight per day of age (WDA) and final weight. Maternal considers fertility, phenotype, temperament and maternal expected progeny differences (EPDs). Carcass is evaluated based on ribeye area, percent intramuscular fat, backfat and ribeye area to carcass weight ratio.

Bulls are indexed in each trait category. Bulls with an index greater than 100 performed better than average, while bulls with an index less than 100 performed below average in that area. From that data the Snake



River Bull Test Index or “SRBT Index” is calculated.

This index is utilized to determine the 120 bulls that are featured in the sale.

“We want the best performers; we say we are marketing the best of the best bulls on test,” says Anderson.

Producer perspective

As they’ve established the Snake River Bull Test, Anderson acknowledges there has been a learning curve, and he says each year they’ve made changes to improve.

“We want to provide a service that accommodates the needs of our consignors and buyers,” he explains. “It’s been a good adventure working with good cattlemen and good genetics.”

The consignors are pleased with the opportunity the new bull test brings to their region as well. Kevin Thibault, partner in Gem State Angus at Jerome, Idaho, had two of the top-gaining bulls at the test during its first year in 2014, and had a bull that earned the overall champion status during the 2015 test.

Thibault, whose family manages about 100 Angus cattle, says the Snake River Bull Test brings new opportunities to the region for registered breeders. He acknowledges that it will take time for the test to build up the quality and reputation of long-time tests like Midland Bull Test and Treasure Bull Test, but he adds that with the commitment of Anderson and Eborn, “There’s a bright future ahead.”

Nephi, Utah, cattleman Paul McPherson says he enjoys consigning to bull tests because of the opportunity to gather information on genetics and make comparisons to other bulls on test. McPherson operates McPherson Farms with about 300 registered Angus and markets 50-60 Angus bulls each year through private treaty. At the 2016 Snake River Bull Test sale, he had three Angus bulls top the market at \$6,000 each.

McPherson especially likes the three-trait focus that Snake River Bull Test uses to evaluate bulls.

“I like that this is not just a test about rate of gain. There’s as much information provided as a consignor or buyer could want,” he says.

McPherson also appreciates that Anderson and Eborn have been willing to listen to producer input and make some improvements to the bull-test format since its first year.

“They’ve been good to work with and want to make it a great event,” he concludes.

Jerome veterinarian Dean Lusk has been involved with the bull test not only as a veterinarian, but also as a consignor. His 50-head Angus herd, called Hundred Acres Ranch, has consigned for the past two years.

Lusk notes, “It has been good to have data back and see the comparisons of genetics both in phenotype and EPDs.”

Also a fan of the evaluations for growth, maternal and carcass traits, Lusk says, “That’s the big draw for buyers, because it helps them select balanced bulls to fit their program.”

Anderson also notes that it has been rewarding for him and Eborn to see their role in helping other producers — both consignors and buyers — succeed. Additionally, Anderson and Eborn have enjoyed having their families involved in doing some of the work for the bull test.

Regarding their goals for the future, Anderson says he and Eborn would like to one day have a facility of their own and be feeding the bulls themselves. They also anticipate growing to as many as 250-300 head on test. Most importantly, he says, their goal is to live up to their mission, which is to: “Improve and expand America’s beef industry by providing seedstock producers an opportunity to performance test and market their superior genetics.”

Learn more about the Snake River Bull Test at their website, www.snakeriverbulltest.com, or on their Facebook page.



Editor’s Note: Kindra Gordon is a cattlegirl and freelance writer from Whitewood, S.D.

ASSOCIATION HIGHLIGHTS

Cattlemen’s Boot Camp postponed

The Cattlemen’s Boot Camp scheduled for Sept. 21-22 at the University of Nebraska’s East Campus in Lincoln, Neb., has been postponed. The American Angus Association and the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL) will reschedule the educational event in the near future.

Cattlemen’s Boot Camps provide purebred and commercial cattle producers timely information presented by academic and industry professionals. Funded by the Angus Foundation, the events are open to all cattle producers and feature two days of educational speakers, workshops and hands-on activities. Attendees will hear market outlooks; range and crop management tips; updates on carcass trends; and information on bull selection, source verification, genetic improvement and general herd management.

Visit www.angus.org for updates on the rescheduling as it develops.

The Angus Report celebrates five years on RFD-TV

The Association launched the weekly broadcast of *The Angus Report* in September 2011 as a way to deliver news and information to cattlemen and women nationwide. Through its distribution on RFD-TV, *The Angus Report* reaches more than 70,000 households across the United States and ranks among the network’s top ag news programs.

“As we celebrate our fifth year on RFD-TV, we’re grateful to all our members and viewers who trust our team for their beef cattle news and information,” says Crystal Albers, Angus Media communications director and *The Angus Report* producer and co-host.

The 30-minute weekly program addresses top news headlines, market reports from CattleFax, features on supplying quality beef, and highlights from Angus activities and events. *The Angus Report* also features popular segments from the *I Am Angus*® documentary series, which shares the heart of the Angus business — its people and their commitment to raising quality cattle.

The broadcast airs at 7:30 a.m. central each Monday and at 1:30 p.m. Saturday. It can be found on DirecTV channel 345 and Dish Network channel 231.

To watch segments from past shows, visit the Association’s website or YouTube channel.

More Snake River Bull Test details

- ▶ Bulls consigned can be spring-born (junior) or fall-born (senior). About one-fifth of the sale offerings are senior bulls.
- ▶ The bull test is open to all breeds and composites, as long as the animal is registered with a breed association.
- ▶ Entry forms are accepted each year mid-September. Bulls are received the first Saturday in October. They are then on a warm-up ration for two weeks before weights are taken and the test begins. Bulls are weighed once a month until the sale. During the first week of February, breeding soundness exams are conducted and the Snake River Bull Test (SRBT) index is calculated to determine the 120 bulls that will be featured in the sale.
- ▶ Throughout the test period, all information is available to consignors and the public with reports posted on the SRBT website.

Editor’s Note: For more schedule details of the Snake River Bull Test and other bull tests across the country, see page 166 in this issue or visit <http://www.api-virtualibrary.com/CentralBullTests.htm>.