

Good Bull Ads Let Data Shine

Two very important functions should occur when advertising bulls for sale.

by *Kris Ringwall*

For the money spent on bull advertising, two very important functions should occur. For the seller, the ad needs to attract buyers. For the buyer, the ad needs to provide information about the bulls offered for sale.

Because space costs money, judicious use of space is important. A picturesque background and good pictures of bulls certainly extend credibility to the ads, but intended buyers

already know what cows and bulls look like. Some discretion could be utilized on how extensive the background is and just how many pictures are substituted for words, numbers or other factual information.

The imagery may draw potential buyers, so the main point is met, which is to get bull buyers to look at the ad. The bigger challenge is to present information that helps the buyer.

Obviously, the name of the operation is paramount. Next is the date, time and site of the sale. Good ads are an opportunity to raise the flag for any operation and boldly project information about the quality of the cattle being offered for sale.

One common mistake is that most ads seem to take for granted that all potential buyers are familiar with the names of the cattle. Yes, the established buyers will recognize the names, but the ability to attract new buyers who may not be familiar with your breed or reputation requires that some data be presented.

Another important requirement is that the data be obvious and noticed quickly. This is important because there are many competing ads and potential buyers have limited time to search ads.

EPDs and ranks

An often overlooked and sometimes missing piece of information is the percentile ranking information within each breed for the expected progeny differences (EPDs). This could be for selected herd sires or selected bulls being offered for sale. This information should be in every sale book, but is seldom in the ads leading up to the sale.

The individual EPD values should be listed along with the percentile ranking within the breed. For example, Bull A could have a weaning weight EPD value of plus 49 pounds (lb.) and rank in the upper 15% of the set of

current sires within the breed. That certainly aids a prospective buyer in making some quick predeterminations as to what herds should be visited further.

Perhaps a buyer is concerned with the marbling ability of the calves produced by the operation. In this case, finding bulls that rank high for marbling is important, and it certainly would be beneficial to read ads that list the ranking of the bulls being offered for sale. If the bulls rank high within the breed for marbling, then that producer should be on the "get to" list. If the bulls rank relatively low within the breed for marbling, there is no sense attending the sale.

No picture anywhere is going to relay that information; only breed association EPD data will, and that data is critical in making decisions for carcass traits or other traits that cannot be seen by the naked eye.

Marbling, ribeye area, fat thickness, intramuscular fat and maternal milk are traits that need to be built into the respective herd objectives and focused on when buying bulls. Why not put that information front and center when advertising bulls so it is easier for prospective buyers to find and sort? There are a lot of beef programs that need great bulls. Great bulls have numbers that need to be presented.

There is nothing wrong with going to a sale for lunch; just don't bid on bulls that don't have numbers that will meet production goals.



Editor's Note: *Kris Ringwall, Extension beef specialist at North Dakota State University (NDSU), authors a weekly "Beef Talk" column distributed by the NDSU Agricultural Communication office. The column addresses the past, present and future state of the beef cattle business and is a regular column in the Angus Beef Bulletin. Your comments are welcome at www.beefstalk.com.*