

Better Bulls = More Profit

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I once heard Dr. David Kirkpatrick, Beef Breeding Specialist for UT, say "Buying a bull without EPDs is like buying a grab bag at a local gas station. You never know what you are getting!"

Now that the industry has tools like the EPDs, producers can make informed decisions to better their herd. The fastest way to better a herd is buying a better bull. Of course, these better bulls come with a bigger price tag, but they are well worth the extra cash. Now with calf prices higher than they have ever been, it is the perfect time to invest for the future of the herd. Even when calf prices come back down, and yes eventually the normal calf cycle will return, that better bull will make money for the operation.

I know what you are thinking, "Go ahead, show me how to make more money by spending more?" I'm glad you asked.

Typically, East Tennessee producers sell their calves at weaning. So if weaning weights increase, producers will bring home more profit. There are two bulls that we are looking at buying. Bull A has a weaning weight (WW) EPD of +30 and bull B has an EPD of +50 WW. In general, the calves from bull B will weigh twenty pounds heavier at weaning than those of bull A. If we bred 30 cows and had a 90% calf crop, then we would have an additional 540 pounds to sell. If five weight calves are bringing \$1.30 a pound then that's \$702 more in your pocket for one calf crop. Now the question to ask is, "How much more did they want for bull B?" In this example we could pay \$500 more for bull B and come out ahead the first calf crop. Not to mention future calf crops. Also remember the spread between the EPD's will make a difference too. A bull with +60 WW is worth more than one with +10 WW. Make sure you can justify more money spent.



Bull A (\$1500) WW +30 sires 27 calves

 $27 \times 520 \text{ pounds} = 14,040 \text{ pounds}$

 $14,040 \times 1.30/\text{pound} = \$18,252 \text{ total check}$



Bull B (\$2000) WW +50 sires 27 calves

 $27 \times 540 \text{ pounds} = 14,580 \text{ pounds}$

 $14,580 \times 1.30/\text{pound} = \$18,954 \text{ total check}$

\$702 more in your pocket!

I'm asked by producers all the time, "What should I give for a good bull?" There are all kinds of factors to consider. The general rule nationwide is that a bull is worth 27 times the current selling price (hundred weight) of six weight steers. If those steers are averaging \$120 per hundred pounds, bulls should be worth about \$3240 ($27 \times 120 = 3240$). Again, this is just a guide not a set rule. Keep in mind location. East Tennessee producers will normally pay \$1500 to \$2400 for a bull. One reason is because the herd size averages 25-28 mamma cows. Producers can only realize so much profit on one calf crop here.

Producers always want to make comparisons across breeds. This is difficult, but not impossible. There is an "Across Breed EPD Chart" which can be found on the internet. This chart allows a producer to add or subtract numbers so a comparison can be made. The chart is published every year from the USDA Meat Animal Research Center to keep data current.

Finally, there is a lot to consider when using EPDs. If you are breeding heifers, choose a low birth weight bull. If you are breeding only mature cows, you can be a little less concerned with birth weight EPD's and concentrate on bulls with more growth. If you never keep or sell replacement heifers, the milk EPD is of no concern to you. Remember, the bull is half the genetics of the herd. The better the bull, the better the overall herd genetics.