**The Most Common Genetic Mistakes Made by Cow/Calf Producers**

**More Is Not Better – When it comes to EPD’s**!

We can all do the math. +100 is more than +90 on yearling weight. On milk, +30 is more than +20 and that means more pounds to sell at weaning, right? However, these EPD’s only measure output – not profit. Profit is output minus cost. Unfortunately more output usually comes from more inputs – i.e. more feed. Animals with higher EPD’s for yearling and milk don’t convert better, they just eat more per day. Bigger EPD, higher feed consumption cattle have bigger mature weights. In fact, the dam of the average +100 YW EPD bull weighs over 1650 pounds in good body condition.

**$Beef Is Not the Best Angus EPD**

$Beef is a terminal EPD, because it only measures traits in the feedlot and on the rail. The $B EPD does not include any traits at or before weaning. Selecting for $Beef will make your cows bigger and harder doing. If you are a cow/calf producer who sells calves at weaning, you need to focus on the traits prior to weaning – calving ease, fertility traits, weaning weight, milk production, cow size and cow cost. All of these traits, except fertility, are incorporated into the Angus $Weaning EPD. $W does not include a negative relationship between milk and fertility. The $W EPD assumes that high milk cattle breed just as well as low milk cattle. However, we know that this is not true. Cattle with milk at or above +25 have fertility problems in our environment. Maybe your environment is tougher and you need to cap milk at +20 or even +15 – then select for the highest $W you can find!

**High Marbling Cattle do Not Always Earn More Money**

We all love to eat highly marbled beef, and we love to produce it. However, when the choice select spread is around $10 – you can lose more selecting for marbling than you make. Marbling is antagonistic to muscle and carcass weight. When feeding margins are positive (i.e. cost of gain is less than the fed cattle price) then carcass weight is one of the most important traits. Additionally, feed conversion suffers when you take cattle to a high degree of finish. In today’s high feed cost environment, a ½ pound improvement on feed efficiency (i.e. 6:1 vs. 6.5:1) is worth $50 per head in the lot. This makes conversion the most important trait; and carcass weight is second. Unfortunately, marbling does not earn as much money as either conversion or carcass weight.

**Don’t Buy Negative Birth EPD Bulls for use on Cows**

We are big advocates of using low birth weight bulls – especially on heifers. However, in today’s bull market you will find that good quality heifer bulls cost a fortune. Unfortunately, most heifer bulls give up a lot on growth, muscle, and bone. If you are buying a bull for use only on cows, you should be able to find really good bulls with birth weight EPD’s between zero and breed average. These bulls will give you more of the traits you want and cost you less money. At the end of the day, can you really afford to give up 10 pounds or more at birth on a bull that is going to breed your cows? We don’t think so!

**Culling Cows will Not Improve Your Herd**

Many commercial producers would like to keep cow production records to pick which cows to cull. This is a great idea, but in reality, it does not work. For starters, you have to cull a number of cows every year simply based on age, fertility, and structure. This does not leave you much room for making selection progress. Base your female culling decisions on economics, not genetics. Improve your genetics by purchasing better bulls.

**Don’t Pick Oranges from an Apple Tree**

One of the fundamental rules of animal selection is that animals “tend” towards their breed average and towards the herd average of the breeder. For example, if you want marbling buy an Angus bull, not a high marbling Continental bull. If you want a heifer bull, buy a low birth weight bull from a low birth weight herd – not a low birth weight bull from a herd with a high birth weight average. When it comes time to shop for bulls, first pick a breed and then pick a breeder.

**Source: Excerpts from Leachman Seminar**

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