

## Planning Ahead-A Five Step Process to Successful Sire Selection

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Sire selection can be a challenging process but is critical to the long-term success of a cow/calf enterprise. In fact, 85 to 90 percent of the genetic improvement observed in a beef herd is the direct result of sire selection, so it is imperative that you do your homework and are well prepared to make a successful bull purchase. Here are a few tips to help identify the correct bull for your operation.

### Step One

#### ***Self-evaluation***

Buying bulls begins by establishing both short-and long-term goals for the breeding program. Identifying a direction and establishing a plan to move in that direction is necessary to identify the type of bulls that will help meet goals. Furthermore, if breeding program goals haven't been defined, there is no measure by which to determine if progress is being made or if selection decisions are meaningful. In most cases, goals will not be static, but rather will change over time as genetic change takes place. However, it is important to remember at some point a lack of change should be the goal as optimum levels of traits are reached for the production environment. Indefinite genetic change should never be a selection goal.

Secondly, evaluate the cow herd and identify selection priorities that are in line with both short and long-term goals; however, realize that many traits with the greatest economic impact are lower heritability traits (i.e., fertility and longevity) and will take a long-term selection approach to achieve your goals.

### Step Two

#### ***Evaluate potential seedstock providers***

Selecting the correct seedstock provider is as important as selecting the correct bull, so it should not be taken lightly. First and foremost, seedstock providers must exhibit honesty

and integrity in all aspects of their business. Investing in a bull that may be misrepresented can be catastrophic, so get to know the people behind the bulls first.

Secondly, a seedstock provider should manage cattle in a way that creates environmental challenges or bottlenecks—never at a level greater than the commercial breeder. Doing so helps identify cattle that can adapt to the natural environment and eliminates those that have difficulty dealing with environmental stress. Furthermore, identify seedstock providers in a similar environment/climate as they are much more likely to have similar selection goals relative to environmental adaptability. Purchasing bulls from an incompatible environment can put you at a disadvantage.

Finally, seedstock providers should be willing to share all information requested on the bulls in their offering. If somewhat limited information is available in the sale catalog, don't be afraid to ask for additional information. Lack of willingness to disclose all information should be viewed as a red flag.

## **Step Three**

### ***Evaluate the offering***

When receiving a bull sale catalog from a selected seedstock provider, begin by critically evaluating the list of reference sires. Identify sires that fit established breeding goals and objectives, and only look at sons of these sires. Next, study these sire groups and identify bulls that meet established selection criteria for expected progeny differences as well as individual and dam performance. If videos are available, use this information to evaluate phenotype, and create a list of bulls that meet, or exceed, all selection criteria.

After identifying several bulls of interest, contact the seller. Ask about their dam, feet, soundness, management, etc. Use this as an opportunity to gather as much additional information as possible to finalize the list of bulls of interest. Additionally, it can be helpful to inquire about the interest level in selected bulls to determine if they may be affordable given your budget.

## **Step Four**

### ***Establish a budget***

Never go to a sale without a budget. Establish a price point based upon your overall enterprise budget and stick to it. Nevertheless, never let one or two bids prevent you from purchasing the right bull, so keep that in mind when the sale starts.

## Step Five

### *Sale day*

Begin by studying the bulls previously selected and only those bulls. Don't get distracted and begin looking at data on other bulls. Stay focused and critically evaluate phenotype on the bulls selected prior to arrival. At this point, your list should only get smaller, not larger.

If you only need one or two bulls, try to rank the bulls that are still on your list. The sale order may help you do this. When the sale starts, only buy from your list. If the bulls on your list are out of your price range, don't get discouraged and make an impulse purchase. There will be another sale and another day to buy the right bull.

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