
Selection of Breeding Stock

There are four characteristics that are vital in the selection of the seedstock producer you should seek out for your cowherd. Honesty and Integrity, Clear Breeding Objectives, Accurate Performance Records, Value for the Price.

I would recommend visiting the farm of the breeder you are considering buying heifers or bulls from well before any purchases are planned. Judging honesty is only part of this mission. Ask previous buyers and visit one of their herds near your operation. This will get you a chance to see the applied stock performance. If you know any deals which went not so well ask about them. Judge the true information about these situations to measure the integrity of this breeder you are considering.

The seedstock producer you select should have breeding objectives which match your herd goals. They should be well planned and achievable objectives. You know for example that just focusing on increasing weaning weights might move their herd and yours to larger cows and no more efficiency of production. You need to access if this breeding line will match well with other seedstock suppliers you are considering in your herd crossbreeding plan. There is no question that as a commercial producer you should be in a crossbreeding plan. Crossbred cows will stay in the herd one year longer and produce 766 pounds more calf to sell which amounts to a 25% increase in performance. This is backed by numerous research studies including some conducted in the late 1990's.

Accurate performance records are important. Ask to look at the producers field calving notes and the method they use to gather birth weights. Birth weights are not only quite heritable, they are also highly correlated to mature size. This has been confirmed by research studies conducted at the USDA Meat Animal Research Center. A birth weight record gathered by taping the heart girth is certainly not going to be as valuable as actual scale weights. Whole herd reporting of fertility records would be more desirable than only counting those who weren't culled. Fertility in your herd is a key issue. Three breeds are currently offering maintenance cost estimates as part of their records. Since sixty percent of the cost of a beef cow is feed, this could be quite helpful information.

Value for the Price should be measured by numerous factors. Does this seed stock producer fit in with production of a product which fits your market niche. This is going to become increasingly important as we identify animals and trace product, management, handling, origin, etc. Perhaps the seedstock producers are going to even become a key part of marketing assistance, consulting, branding, and identification. Is there service after the sale in terms of delivery of the bull or heifers, visiting your herd, helping to target bulls for your operation using EPD data, providing bulls of consistent rating in an affordable price range rather than "the bull" outside an acceptable price range.

Paul C Hay, Extension Educator

University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension in Gage County • 1115 West Scott Street, Beatrice NE 68310

(402) 223-1384 • FAX: (402) 223-1370 • email: phay1@unl.edu

