

Cattle Business in Mississippi – March 2018
“Beef Production Strategies” article
Top 10 Bull Buying Strategies

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During the month of February, the state of Mississippi experienced all four seasons. There were several days of bitter cold and a few days of sunshine and warm temps. In Starkville, we are anxiously awaiting spring green-up. Since Dixie Nationals, we've been busy attending Producer Advisory Councils hosted by the R&E Centers and preparing for the Hinds Bull Test/ BCIA bull sale. As we put together the catalog, it was apparent that our seedstock producers are placing emphasis on traits that impact the commercial cattlemen's bottom line.

In my February column, I wrote about things commercial cattlemen should look for when determining where to buy bulls. For this month's article, I will cover bull selection.

- 1.) Buying a bull you can look at in person or on video is crucial. I recommend that you examine bulls from the ground up. How are their feet and legs? Are they sound in their joints? Sound structure in a bull is a must for him to successfully cover cows.
- 2.) Selecting pedigreed bulls will assist with predictability in calf crops.
- 3.) EPDs work, but keep them in perspective. While owning a bull in the top 1% of the breed for weaning weight may lend your calves some extra pounds on sale day, it could also impact your mature cow sizes down the road (if you keep replacement heifers).
- 4.) Using EPDs to increase the genetic merit of your calf crop is recommended, but it is important to remember that added outputs (growth and milk) often require more inputs. Optimize your environment with matching genetics.
- 5.) Are you breeding heifers? Look to CED and BW EPDs to help with your selection. Heifer suitable bulls should offer acceptable growth.
- 6.) Pay attention to what your current sires are producing on your cows. If you think your current calves are too big or small at birth, use BW EPD to make changes.
- 7.) Carcass EPDs are important for the final outcome of beef production. If you are using carcass oriented sires, think about how to capitalize on this selection through marketing.
- 8.) Bulls should be guaranteed to be virgins or have a negative Trich test. The last thing you want your bull to infect your cows with is a venereal disease!
- 9.) Buy a bull that has passed a thorough BSE.
- 10.) Buy a bull that complements your cow herd. Consider crossbreeding for heterosis benefits.

There are many factors to consider when you purchase a new herd sire. If you retain replacement females, the impact will be felt for many generations. Determining what you are looking for and doing homework prior to the sale will help make sure you do not make an impulse purchase that will be regretted later on.

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For more information about beef cattle production, contact an office of the Mississippi State University Extension Service or visit extension.msstate.edu.