



SISKIYOU STOCKMAN

What's New in the "Top of the State". A report for Siskiyou Livestock Producers put out by the Farm Advisors Office, Cooperative Extension of the University of California, located at 1655 South Main Street, Yreka, California 96097

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Sire Selection – Determining Goals and Beginning Preparation for Purchases

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- Sire Selection – Determining Goals and Beginning Preparation for Purchases
- Cattle Health Meeting
- Succession Planning for Ranching Families

Calendar

Jan 29	Succession Planning for Ranching Families, Klamath Falls, OR
Feb 12	Growers Seminar, Miners Inn Convention Center, Yreka, CA. Further details will be mailed
March 11	Cattle Health Meeting, Montague Elementary School

Every bull purchase provides an opportunity for improvement in marketable calves and future replacement heifers. The key is determining what improvements are most important. By finding the most crucial needs for improvement in a particular herd, you are setting sire selection goals. Identifying the most crucial needs also allows you to focus your selection on fewer traits.

Data collection by the purebred industry allows for the manipulation of an ever-increasing number of economically important traits through bull purchases. Single trait selection is usually frowned upon, as there may be deleterious consequences on numerous other traits. However, if a large number of traits are in the selection process, genetic progress is slow. As a practical guideline most selection should be done on at least three traits. While this is somewhat arbitrary, the point is progress can be made on several traits that are of utmost importance.

A balance between the environment in which cattle are run, the marketing scheme, and reproductive performance will ultimately decide the traits and level of each trait and, consequently, what sire is selected. The environment cattle are in dictates feed availability, the most important input cost. Multiple factors influence the nutrition requirements for cow maintenance but the most influential are mature body size and milk production. Feed requirements going towards body maintenance are a year-round consideration, whereas feed for milk is seasonal. If lactation occurs at a time of year with reduced or limited feed resources, milk potential should be

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carefully evaluated to make sure it is not too high for the feed resources. Knowing environmental constraints is critical to determine appropriate production levels in your cattle. This is critical because many factors, most importantly reproduction, are contingent upon cattle maintaining adequate body condition. Use EPDs for mature weight and milk production to determine the appropriate level for your environmental conditions.

Most marketing systems are still selling pounds of beef (i.e. heavier calves bring more money), so weaning and/or yearling weight is important. For this reason, sensible goals for growth (weaning and yearling weight EPDs) will always be of concern. Nevertheless, what if calves are retained through harvest or sold directly to feeders? While on feed, smaller framed cattle will reach maturity earlier and begin to accumulate back fat earlier, essentially finishing faster. Earlier finishing dates mean less time on feed and reduced feed costs. With higher costs for grain, this could be important.

A quandary is processors have more efficiency with carcasses of about 740 pounds (a live weight of about 1200 pounds). This is a frame score of 6. Mature cows of frame score 6 weigh about 1250 pounds. With frame score 6 cows, ideal bulls would also be a 6 frame score. Determining a marketing plan or eventual goal in marketing calves will determine where market end points are and the demand at those end points. For this goal, try to think down the road.

Retaining heifers adds other criteria in terms of reproductive performance and mothering ability. For example, a terminal crossbreeding program can add size to calves to market, but if heifers from the terminal sires are retained the result can be added frame to the cowherd. Additionally, factors such as calving ease must be considered as dystocia can devastate calving intervals and greatly increase labor. Besides culling cows that don't perform to herd standards and bringing in outside cattle, breeding for desirable replacement heifers is one of the only means of moving an entire cowherd in the direction of choice. There is so much variety in environments, marketing schemes and desired reproductive performance; no single breed is perfect for all situations. In the recent past marketing incentives have heavily influenced breeders towards the Angus breed. The value of crossbreeding has been shown since the 1940s, and with well-managed systems the cattle can retain a preponderance of

Angus looks and genetics, capturing market advantages, and crossbreeding heterosis benefits.

Once the goals for a potential sire are identified, determine the appropriate EPD values. Most people are aware of their weaning or sale weights but that does little to help in determining appropriate EPD values. Similarly, weaning or yearling weights of a potential herd sire don't translate well into anticipated weights of your calves. Some people will compare the EPD values of a potential sale bull with breed averages. While this can accurately compare the bull to average for the breed, your specific herd may be above or below average, but you don't know based on your sale weights. You can also compare the EPD values of different bulls to determine how each would impact your calves but this is limited to comparing between those bulls, their calves might be heavier or lighter when used in your herd.

A simple method to set appropriate EPD values for potential sire purchases is to determine the EPDs of your current sires. If you take the average EPD values for your current herd sires you will have a relatively accurate level to judge potential new herd sires. (If you retain replacement heifers, then the cowherd will also tend to reflect these same relative EPD levels.) Knowing the EPD values for your current herd sires you can more easily evaluate the change in potential new herd sires by comparing their EPD values to your average herd EPD values. Remember, if mature weight and milk levels are higher in the "new" sires and replacements are kept, increased feed resources will be required.

Purchases of young bulls is problematic due to limited accuracy of their EPDs. Accuracies are often ignored. There is an old saying, "if you have to buy a bad bull, buy a big one." A modern saying might be, "if you have to buy a low accuracy bull, don't spend much." Why spend a lot of money on pedigree or a promise, when the accuracy is low. The exception might be the extremely high (or low depending on trait) EPD with a low accuracy. With more data collection, it is likely that the EPD will drop, but if it starts extremely high, it will *likely* still be relatively high after it is recalculated with more data. A complete review of sire selection can be found in the publication "Beef Sire Selection Manual" produced by the National Beef Cattle Evaluation Consortium. This can be located in its entirety at <http://ucanr.org/siremanual>, and some Cooperative Extension offices may have printed

copies. As a short refresher, here are a few points to consider:

- Remember that EPDs cannot be compared across breeds. This means the +25 for weaning weight on a Hereford bull cannot be compared to the +18 weaning weight on an Angus bull. EPDs CAN BE COMPARED WITHIN BREED ONLY.
- Special calculations can be done to convert EPDs from one breed to another. See a specialist or someone highly experienced in these calculations.
- Many sale catalogs list the EPDs of the bulls they are offering for sale. This information is most useful if you know the EPD values of your current herd sires for comparison.
- Make sure you look at the accuracy of the EPD. Accuracies of less than 0.20 indicate the EPD value may change significantly.
- Accuracies will improve as more data is collected on the young sire either through his calves or his relatives. When you look through some sale catalogs, you will see the notation "I" before the EPD. This is an "Interim" EPD that notifies the buyer that there is not a lot of data behind the current EPD.
- Make sure you know what you are selecting for. Keep the list of traits relatively small. For example, calving ease, weaning weight and marbling. Think long-term unless you are using terminal sires. "Simple" breeding systems that retain replacement heifers require relatively middle of the road selection standards and consistency. More milk means more feed.
- Even if you are not retaining ownership or involved in an alliance, carcass attributes may be important through tracking of your calves' carcasses by buyers.
- EPDs have been extremely successful predicting genetic merit. Always couple the genetic potential of the sale animal with conformation and health evaluations. Structural soundness is essential for longevity. Set up a quarantine period for new purchases before introduction to the herd.

- Seedstock producers attempt to bring their best animals to sale. But what is best for one producer is not best for all. Do your homework before the sale, as it is likely only a few of those offered are right for you. Know which ones fit your genetic needs before the sale, at the sale make sure they have acceptable conformation and good luck is less important but always welcome.

Cattle Health Meeting

Dan Drake, Livestock Farm Advisor

The annual Cattle Health meeting will be held on **TUESDAY, March 11** at 7 pm in the Montague Elementary school. Dr. Bob Sainz from the Animal Science department, UC Davis, will discuss pre-weaning and pre-conditioning nutrition on subsequent growth and development of calves. This has important implications on grid value. With improving tracking, buyers for producers that are not in alliances or retaining ownership, may consider previous calf performance when bidding. It behooves producers to seriously consider nutrition at the cow/calf level as a factor for feedlot and carcass performance. With increasing costs for grain and hay, understanding the implications of feeds on performance is cost effective.

Dr. John Maas, Extension Veterinarian, will share his knowledge on important animal diseases. An update on Foothill abortion and progress in its control will be provided. Dr. Maas will also talk about leptospirosis variants that maybe of concern and results of BVD vaccine challenges.

The meeting will conclude with Siskiyou County CattleWomen pies.

Succession Planning for Ranching Families

Contact Bart Eleveld at Oregon State 531 737-1409 or myself regarding this opportunity for estate planning in Klamath Falls, OR on **January 29**.

