

Buying Bulls

By Martha Thomas

Ranchers must invest in high quality bulls if they want calves that will meet industry standards. A rancher's number one goal is to make money. So you want more pounds to sell. This is accomplished through increased reproduction. This means having a sound bull and moderately framed productive cattle. The easiest and fastest way to improve traits in cattle is to use Expected Progeny Differences (EPD's).

Factors to consider:

Marketing ability of breed- get out and visit markets and bull sales and make sure you are breeding a calf that is in high demand.

Will heifers be saved as replacements- Some breeds do not make good mothers in Florida's climate also you will look for different traits in a bull that you will be saving heifers from.

Find a bull that is acclimated to your ranch's climate and management conditions. Many times bulls that are brought to Florida from out-of-state can not withstand the hot, humid weather which leads to death and poor production of bulls.

Moderate Frame- feedlots want calves that will finish around 1,200 pounds and we want moderate framed cows so we can produce more calves per acre of land

Carcass Qualities- which is determined by fat thickness, ribeye area, and marbling this is how carcasses are valued.

Scrotal Circumference- has effect on fertility of bull and early maturity of his female offspring.

For commercial production you need to have a planned cross breeding system to get the advantage of Hybrid Vigor which provides improved weaning weights, cattle longevity, and reproductive performance.

Conformation, structural soundness, and temperament must always be evaluated.

All traits must be evaluated relative to the cow herd the bull will be used on.

Bulls Age Bull to Cow Ratio

12-18 months 1:15-25

2 years 1:30-35

3-7 years 1:35-60

Aged (seven plus) 1:30-40

A breeding soundness evaluation (BSE) is a quick and relatively inexpensive way of assessing a bull's breeding potential. A BSE should be conducted on a yearly basis by a qualified veterinarian. Bulls should be examined at least 60 days prior to the beginning of the breeding season. This allows for re-testing and replacement of bulls failing the examination. A BSE consists of four basic steps:

1. Visual assessment of the feet, legs, eyes, teeth and external genitalia;
2. Palpation of the accessory sex glands (prostate and seminal vesicles);
3. Measurement of the scrotum as well as palpation of the testis and epididymis;
4. Collection and microscopic evaluation of a semen sample.