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Beef sire selection important for cattlemen

Purchasing the next herd sire is one of the most important decisions a cattleman makes. Since every calf in the herd gets half of its genetic makeup from the sire and half from its dam, the sire is said to be half the herd. After 10 years of breeding, approximately 88 percent of the genetic makeup of a herd will have come from the bulls used.

The sire influences the herd in two ways. First, he changes the current calf crop. Secondly, he influences later calf crops through daughters that are retained for use as brood cows. The sire's influence may either be in a positive or negative direction. Clearly, sire selection is the major tool available to producers for changing the genetic potential of their herds.

When selecting a bull for natural service, a buyer must know the kind of bull that will meet the breeding program's needs. The kind of bull needed will depend upon available resources, such as feed, labor, facilities, cow herd, environment, market demand and the breeding plan followed. The goal is to find a complete, functional bull capable of siring calves that will contribute to herd profitability. Producers can no longer afford to try to maximize any single trait.

After the type of bull needed has been determined, the next step is to decide where to buy. Consider only reputable sources that can provide complete performance records on their bulls.

Sellers should have results of breeding soundness examinations available. They also should guarantee the quality and fertility of bulls and guarantee that ancestors are not known carriers of genetic defects. Excellent sources are herds actively involved in performance testing.

Bulls may be bought either by private treaty or at production sales, central test-station sales, or consignment sales. Be sure the information needed to make a wise decision is provided.

If it is not presented, ask for it. If this information is not available, look elsewhere for performance-proven bulls. Remember that an animal may be performance tested and still be undesirable. A rule of thumb on how much you can afford to pay for a herd sire is three to five times the value of your average cow.

After sources have been identified, it is time to evaluate the bulls available and their performance data. This step involves evaluating structural

soundness, fertility, growth, calving ease, frame size, and maternal performance.

If a bull survives these three selection steps and can be purchased at a reasonable price, he should be added to your herd. Genetically superior bulls contribute to the profitability of an operation.

For more information, stop by the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension office and ask for a copy of the fact sheet "Beef Sire Selection" or call 425-2335.