

Bull Buying Season

You can tell it's that time of year, to buy a bull, when your mailbox is filled up with sale catalogs! For decades we have been collecting performance data on bulls, but in earlier times it was mostly individual performance under feedlot conditions. A large breakthrough came when computers became available and statistical methods were developed to calculate Expected Progeny Differences. EPD's provide an estimate of the genetic potential of an animal as a parent based upon three sources of information: ancestors, the animal's own record and the record of its progeny.

EPD's are calculated by breed associations for all kinds of traits. Once you've determined which traits are the most important to your herd, you can go bull buying!

One of the most common mistakes with purchasing young bulls is bringing them home, turning them out with older bulls, and expecting them to do well. Most yearling bulls have spent the last 5 to 6 months on a high nutritional plane. They have been pushed and expected to achieve as much growth as possible. Removing them from that level of nutrition and putting them on a maintenance diet can be detrimental.

It may not be necessary to keep the young bull on a high gaining diet, but the bull is still growing and needs adequate nutrition. From the time of purchase to breeding season, could be 3 to 5 months, you should strive to keep the bull at a Body Condition Score of 6 at the time of turnout. This will give the bull adequate nutrition and reserves of energy for use during the breeding season. A yearling bull can be expected to lose 100 pounds or more during the breeding season.

Most bulls will be vaccinated and tested for fertility before the sale. If they have not, a breeding soundness exam (BSE) is necessary. Be sure to vaccinate bulls at least 30 days prior to turning out with the cows.

Yearling bulls will need time to adjust to their new surroundings. If you are turning them in with older bulls, they will need a large area so they can determine their order of dominance. Fighting is a natural occurrence with bulls, be sure to stay out of the way, and make sure the facilities can handle these brawls.