

# The 8 Most Common Genetic Mistakes Made by Cow/Calf Producers

## 1. More Is Not Better – When it comes to EPD's!

We can all do the math. +100 is more than +90 on yearling weight. On milk, +30 is more than +20 and that means more pounds to sell at weaning, right? However, these EPD's only measure output – not profit. Profit is output minus cost. Unfortunately more output usually comes from more inputs – i.e. more feed. Animals with higher EPD's for yearling and milk don't convert better, they just eat more per day. Bigger EPD, higher feed consumption cattle have bigger mature weights. In fact, the dam of the average +100 YW EPD bull weighs over 1650 pounds in good body condition.

## 2. Belly Draggers are Not Always More Efficient Cows

If we compare people, it's very hard to distinguish people who are deep ribbed from people that over eat. I think the same applies to cattle. It is nearly impossible to determine efficiency based on phenotype alone. The only way to know efficiency is to measure feed consumption and compare it with output. Most of the time, our deeper ribbed cattle consume more than average on a daily basis, and they don't gain enough to pay for the extra consumption. The most efficient cattle tend to consume average or less feed per day. The good news is that measuring efficiency in growing cattle seems to be 70% correlated to efficiency on grass for cows. There also does not appear to be a negative effect on fertility, calving interval, or production at weaning. But remember, when we identify the most efficient cattle – they may not be "belly draggers."

## 3. \$Beef Is Not the Best Angus EPD

\$Beef is a terminal EPD, because it only measures traits in the feedlot and on the rail. The \$B EPD does not include any traits at or before weaning. Selecting for \$Beef will make your cows bigger and harder doing. If you are a cow/calf producer who sells calves at weaning, you need to focus on the traits prior to weaning – calving ease, fertility traits, weaning weight, milk production, cow size and cow cost. All of these traits, except fertility, are incorporated into the Angus \$Weaning EPD. \$W does not include a negative relationship between milk and fertility. The \$W EPD assumes that high milk cattle breed just as well as low milk cattle. However, we know that this is not true. Cattle with milk at or above +25 have fertility problems in our environment. Maybe your environment is tougher and you need to cap milk at +20 or even +15 – then select for the highest \$W you can find!

## 4. High Marbling Cattle do Not Always Earn More Money

We all love to eat highly marbled beef, and we love to produce it. However, when the choice select spread is around \$10 – you can lose more selecting for marbling than you make. Marbling is antagonistic to muscle and carcass weight. When feeding margins are positive (i.e. cost of gain is less than the fed cattle price) then carcass weight is one of the most important traits. Additionally, feed conversion suffers when you take cattle to a high degree of finish. In today's high feed cost environment, a ½ pound improvement on feed efficiency (i.e. 6:1 vs. 6.5:1) is worth \$50 per head in the lot. This makes conversion the most important trait; and carcass weight is second. Unfortunately, marbling does not earn as much money as either conversion or carcass weight.

## 5. Don't Buy Negative Birth EPD Bulls for use on Cows

We are big advocates of using low birth weight bulls – especially on heifers. However, in today's bull market you will find that good quality heifer bulls cost a fortune. Unfortunately, most heifer bulls give up a lot on growth, muscle, and bone. If you are buying a bull for use only on cows, you should be able to find really good bulls with birth weight EPD's between zero and breed average. These bulls will give you more of the traits you want and cost you less money. At the end of the day, can you really afford to give up 10 pounds or more at birth on a bull that is going to breed your cows? We don't think so!

## 6. Continental Bulls Can Work in Your Cow Herd

We know and love Angus cattle. We also know that we live in an "Angus" world. Angus is the only viable beef breed for use in a straight bred breeding program. However, the right Continental cattle can bring a lot to the table. Many commercial producers do not like Continentals because of too much birth weight, too much size, and too much milk. The big news today is that the moderate Continental genetics actually have less mature size and less milk than Angus. With negative birth EPD's, you can also keep the birth weights down. Continental x Angus hybrids and composites give you an easy way to gain from hybrid vigor, increase muscle, and keep your uniformity. Clay Center data demonstrates that crossbred cows earn \$75 more per head per year through heavier weaning weights, higher rebreeding rates, and living longer (3 more years per cow).

## 7. Culling Cows will Not Improve Your Herd

Many commercial producers would like to keep cow production records to pick which cows to cull. This is a great idea, but in reality, it does not work. For starters, you have to cull a number of cows every year simply based on age, fertility, and structure. This does not leave you much room for making selection progress. Base your female culling decisions on economics, not genetics. Improve your genetics by purchasing better bulls.

## 8. Don't Pick Oranges from an Apple Tree

One of the fundamental rules of animal selection is that animals "tend" towards their breed average and towards the herd average of the breeder. For example, if you want marbling buy an Angus bull, not a high marbling Continental bull. If you want a heifer bull, buy a low birth weight bull from a low birth weight herd – not a low birth weight bull from a herd with a high birth weight average. When it comes time to shop for bulls, first pick a breed and then pick a breeder.

To view and listen to the No Better Bull Presentation on this topic, go to [www.dvauction.com](http://www.dvauction.com).

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