

# Beef Breeders Carefully Consider EPDs, Calving Ease In Dams

(Continued from Page A28)

## Record-keeping

For the farm operated by Mike and Naomi Costello in Pleasant Unity, Westmoreland County, it is a matter of record-keeping — because the bulls have been carefully selected, the selection of herd sires and maintaining careful records on cow fertility goes right along with using bulls. The Costellos are simply more familiar with using maternal breeding techniques and have found them to be dependable, reliable, less costly, and less labor-intensive than using AI.

What does this mean for the industry? For one thing, it means those who raise bulls must pay more attention to their fertility — and that means taking a closer look at their mothers.

"It's hard to put my thumb on what characteristics are more important than any others," said Jim Larson. According to Larson, the two most important traits when selecting herd sires include rate of gain and calving ease.

The cow's milking ability comes into play too, according to Larson. "Because of the milk they provide to the calves, sometimes the high-milking mothers don't look so great, but their heifer calves are kept for the milking ability for the herd," he said.

## Raise 80 cows

The Costellos raise about 80 cows using three bulls on their 236 acre (180 pasture acres) farm. They obtained all their heifers from fall-graded feeder cattle sales in Virginia.

Calving ease was of top concern, according to Costello. The first three bulls for the herd sires came from Wehrmann Farms, in New Market, Va., and milking ability was also an important consideration. Many of the heifers obtained were L-1 (large-framed and with #1 muscling). Two are Rito bulls and one is a Traveler bull.

The Costellos are also using Gelbvieh bulls, obtained from Knoll Crest Farms in Red House, Va., which provide less waste than the Angus, more lean type confirmation, more muscling, better milking ability, good growth, and good hybrid vigor when crossing.



Eugene Wingert, left, and Jere Wingert, herd manager, are shown observing their 1991 calf crop.

"People aren't familiar with the Gelbvieh cattle around here," said Costello. The progeny has included only nine calves. So far, however, according to Costello, they've "all done really well. They have a really nice temperament."

## Four bulls

Altogether, the Wingerts keep four bulls — an Angus, a Salers, an Angus/Chianina cross, and a Simmental.

Most of the farms agree that it would be hard to pinpoint exactly what the "best" crossbreed combination would be. Most, however, are satisfied with the breeds they chose to work with.

"We're always looking for something new that would work for our operation," said Wingert. The important thing for Wingert is to keep looking around and working to find the best combination that will improve the herd.

"We depend a lot on EPDs," said Jim Larson. But to his farm, it's just as important to consider the visual appraisal of the bull as well as the EPDs. Together, those two factors work to provide the best measurement of what bulls will do well in the herd.

## Records for herd

Surprisingly, the three farms did not take time to record exactly what it cost per year to maintain the cows. But records for the whole herd are maintained on each of the farms — the Costellos keep

extensive records on all cows and bulls, especially dates of birth, birth weights, any illness or calving problems, in addition to gain per day and a ratio comparing each calf to all other calves in the herd. They also keep health records, including the dates treated, weights, and "anything that will prove useful to maintaining the herd," said Costello.

Farm records kept by the Wingerts include the dam, mother, calf number, rate of gain indications, and other factors, according to Eugene Wingert. Another big concern, according to Wingert, is the milking ability of the dam.

Herd records kept by the Larsons include the history on every cow — calving records, rate-of-gain, quality of calves, and any other information important to herd management.

For the Larsons, good calves come from the top of the herd — the records make this "pretty obvious," said Jim.

## Ideal weight

The ideal weight for the cow at breeding is around 1,100 pounds, according to Larson. A 550-600 pound calf out of a medium-sized cow is expected, "for as many years as they can keep having calves." One of the cows in the Larson herd is 16 years old.

But looking at the size of the cow and determining what kind of calf she will have will prove fruitless sometimes, according to the farms. In the Costello's case, one

cow "looked so thin" at 900 pounds, but "she had a great calf every year," said Costello. Another cow, weighing about 1,300 pounds, "also had a great calf."

The farms usually go to the local sales and some travel to different parts of the state to sell their calves. The Costellos rely on sales at the Westmoreland County Sale. They are considering using the Tel-O-Auction, a method of marketing feeder cattle.

The Larsons and Wingerts sold several of their calves to local 4-H and FFA clubs, which have garnered several show champions.

## Finish cattle

The Wingerts finish and sell their cattle to Greencastle Livestock Auction and local butchers. In the past, many were sold at the Lancaster Stockyards.

The Larsons sell their calves to the McCoy Cattle Company at the Lancaster Stockyards.

The Larsons rely on fall vaccination, including deworming, with the aid and advice of a veterinarian if need be. The Costellos rely on the advice of Dr. Ron Staas, Latrobe, to help with the program, though most of the farms still do much of the health care by themselves.

To ensure increasing farm productivity, the Wingerts have relied on a diet for the brood cows of a small amount of silage, mostly hay and pasture. "We calve starting March 1," said Wingert. "Right

now we're giving the cows all the good quality alfalfa they can eat. This increases the flow of milk as well as conditions the cow for rebreeding."

During the calving season, the cows are checked every 4-6 hours to make sure they are calving smoothly and to ensure that the calves are healthy.

## Carefully manage program

The Larsons keep the cattle in 800 acres of pasture that is intensively grazed and carefully manage the feeding program.

For all the farms, learning about how to improve the herd is a combination of following the individual herd and, whenever possible, seeking help from the local extension offices and Penn State.

The Larsons, like many commercial beef farms, rely on many of the symposiums and conferences that provide information geared to the needs of commercial producers. In addition, many of the local and national cattle associations offer information for members on herd improvement.

For the Wingerts, in the past, the Performance-Tested Bull Sale has provided them with bulls that were essential to their herd. This year, they will also attend the sale to see what may be available for their herd.

**Editor's note:** The next article in the series will involve trait selection and EPD consideration when selecting a herd bull.

## Consignment Auction Set

DAUPHIN (Dauphin Co.) — Consignments and donations are now being accepted for the eighth annual auction of the Dauphin County Conservation District.

Auction coordinators are seeking quality items such as farm tractors and farm equipment, lawn and garden equipment (all types of mowers and rotatillers), camping equipment, high grade lumber, hardware, power and hand tools, saleable household furnishings, antiques, and collectibles.

Vehicles and boats must include titles — a notary will be present on the day of the sale for transfer. Any item consigned with reserve will require a \$10 fee.

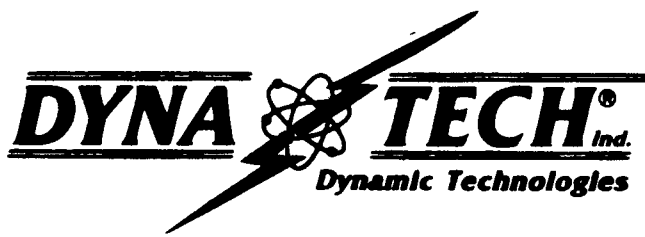
The district urges early consignments and donations, but articles will be accepted until 4 p.m. on April 3. The sale will be held on Saturday, April 4, beginning at 9 a.m. at the Gratz Fairgrounds.

Proceeds of the sale benefit the Dauphin County Agriculture and Natural Resources Center and a scholarship fund for Dauphin County students and teachers in agricultural and environmental science education programs.

To consign and donate items, please call Auction Coordinator Mervin Adams, (717) 692-3076, or Mike Hubler at the district office, (717) 921-8100.

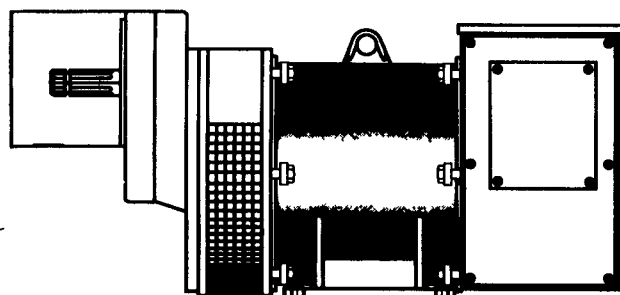
**DON'T LOOK ANY FURTHER!**  
YOU'LL FIND IT IN LANCASTER FARMING'S CLASSIFIEDS

**SPRING PRICES ON SILAGE BAGGERS FOR UNDER \$12,000**  
Also Bags See Page D47 For Details



**DYNA-TECH INDUSTRIES**  
602 E. EVERGREEN ROAD  
LEBANON, PA 17042-7925

**SERVICE OUR FIRST CONSIDERATION**



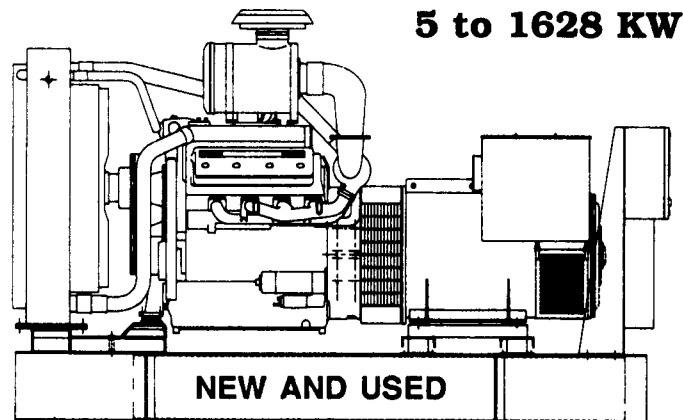
**10 TO 150 KW 1800 RPM BRUSHLESS TRACTOR DRIVEN GENERATORS**

DISTRIBUTOR FOR



**GENERATOR SYSTEMS**

**5 to 1628 KW**



**SALES - SERVICE - RENTALS INSTALLATION**

**UPS, UBS AND SURGE PROTECTION**

**717-274-8899**  
**FAX 717-274-5334**