

Serious Beef Breeders

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Anderson can program a seven-parameter sort to end up with a composite index on each one of his animals.

Work in environment
"It helps me," he said. "I want

an animal with the lowest birth-weight, the highest weaning weight, the most milk from the mother, and the highest yearling weight."

Comerford said that what Anderson is doing is "taking the

EPD, which is the variation of the cattle from the average of the breed across the country, and then looking at how his animals work within the environment that he has for them.

"Now, whether that will breed

in someone else's environment is a question — but the EPDs will breed across the board in the environment," said Comerford. The "environment" is the states in the Mid-Atlantic region. Some of the cattle would not perform to their genetic potential, for instance, in an arid environment such as the Southwest.

Anderson said that Penn State, through the work of Comerford, is trying to create an awareness in the state of Pennsylvania on the part of breeders and commercial cattle breeders on how to purchase a bull that has been created using this as a basis.

Understand environment

According to Comerford, breeders must completely understand their beef cattle environment and use that as a basis in which to work.

"It's pretty refined in other areas of the country where people make a living breeding beef cattle," said Anderson.

Anderson began his herd in 1959. He bought 11 heifers and another 14 heifers the next year from M.V. Hitt in Landenburg, Pa. At the time Anderson started, he said there was no open AI — you had to own the bull in order to register the calf.

"That was absolutely stupid," he said.

But after open AI was accepted, he immediately went to Wye Plantation in Queenstown, Md. and bought semen. During the years since, Anderson has increased the size of the herd, absorbing information from various universities about performance data and EPDs.

Other parameters

Anderson said the work of beef breeders such as Martin Jorgenson in Ideal, S.D. with performance testing, and "folks like John" Comerford, helped Anderson understand "that there were other parameters to select beef cattle by other than a purple ribbon," he said.

Anderson's herd is completely closed. He purchases semen from various agencies throughout the nation.

"The most important consideration is the expected progeny differences — birth, weaning, milk, and yearling, and then the degree of accuracy of those EPDs," he said. "The younger the bull, the lower the accuracy. The older the bull, the higher the accuracy. The number of progeny determine the accuracy of the expected progeny differences."

When Anderson selects stock based on EPDs, he's not looking at the "maximum parameters" anymore. The optimum performance includes a balance of traits.

Balance vital

"We don't want the extremes," he said.

The "balance" is vital to the herd and the industry, according to Comerford.

The beef specialist said that if the entire industry continued to select for higher and higher yearling weights, "it increases mature size. Well, a problem with larger mature size is the increased maintenance cost of breeding animals — bigger cattle eat more feed," he said. "There's an end point."

"We want the smallest birth-weight possible commensurate with acceptable growth," said Anderson. "But if you keep selecting for the smallest birthweight, you keep selecting for the smallest animal. So no matter what you do, there *has* to be a moderation somewhere down the line. It's an antagonistic situation."

Conduct sale

"And probably to the most elite breeders of purebred cattle, the next thing to do is select for these various things: udder size, teat size, udder shape, and confirmation of back legs," said Anderson.

Anderson sells semen for about \$15 a straw — \$30 for an AI certificate.

Sometime next year, Anderson will conduct a sale of about 75-80 of his cows, perhaps with the help of the Virginia Angus Association, in Culpepper, Va.

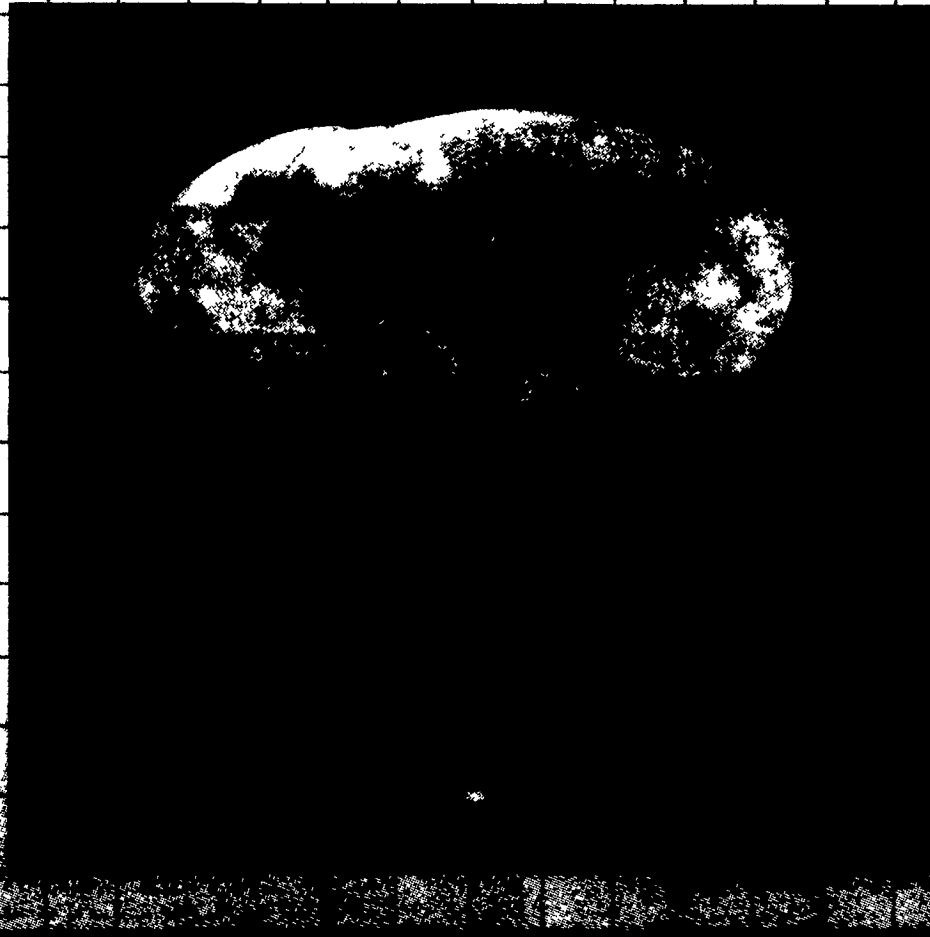
Bulls sold on the farm go for \$100 to \$200 less than at test stations, which furnish complete performance records of animals. In all of the western states, bull buyers take performance data and EPDs seriously and prices are commensurate with what they intend to purchase.



Anderson's yearling bull, "T-Bone," right, prances through the feedlot at the farm.

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