

Performance Records Are Useful

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for the program." Two bulls were selected for placement on the demonstration farms, but an injury to one of them left only the Washington County herd of Jake and Marian Campbell to complete the project.

The bull used was a two-year-old Polled Hereford donated by Paul and Bette Slayton of Bedford, Pennsylvania. His EPDs were well above average for the breed: 0.7 for birth weight, 33.0 for weaning weight, 11.3 for combined maternal, and 55.8 for yearling weight.

"This bull was being compared with two Polled Hereford bulls the Campbells had purchased locally, and visually there was little difference between them," says Wilson. "But with no performance records for the local bulls to indicate their potential value as sires, we felt confident the Slayton bull would be the top performance sire. The proof would be when the calves crossed the scales."

Extension agent Mary Shick monitored the progress at the

Campbell farm. The bulls were confined to a 90-day breeding season, June 1 through August 31. The breeding herd was sorted into three groups with 30 cows allotted to the Slayton bull, 28 to one of the Campbell bulls, and 21 to the younger Campbell bull. The cows were sorted randomly, with all age classes represented in each breeding group. All cows were managed as a single group after the breeding season. All exposed females were palpated on December 4, 1992, and open cows were culled. Cows began calving on February 25, 1993, and the last calf was born on May 20. No calving difficulties were encountered. The following table summarizes the results.

What a difference a bull makes! Using the weaning rate and average weaning weights, the calves from the selected bull returned 67 lb. more calf per cow than the other two bulls. What value is there in using the tools available for genetic improvement in the beef business? In this case (using

an average price of \$82/cwt for feeder calves), it was about \$55 per calf, thus \$1,320 for 24 calves!

We can realistically answer the question, "How much is a bull worth?" This selected bull was worth \$1,320 more than the others in this single calving season. So if he were used for four years on just 30 cows each year, he would be worth \$5,280 more in his lifetime.

But that isn't the end of the story. The Campbells have about a dozen heifers out of the Slayton bull that they will keep for replacements, and these females' genetics for superior performance will be passed on to the next generations.

"Of course, we can't always expect to add over \$50 per calf from the selection of a bull," says Comerford. "Many things influence production—health, nutrition, and so on. But when we have managers as good as Jake and Marian Campbell, we will see the true value of genetic improvement since there are few management impediments to these calves' fully expressing their genetic

potential."

The take-home lesson for a good beef producer: That \$800 bull with no performance records that we bought last year may be the most expensive mistake we've ever made. Several tools are available for cattlemen to help them

select bulls. Until we have this information and make use of it, we're simply speculating on the outcome of a breeding program. With the cost of raising cattle being what it is these days, that's a pretty big risk to take.

Wheat Farmers Concerned About Imports

DENVER, Colo. — Farmers from Montana, Minnesota, North Dakota, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, and South Dakota relayed their frustrations with the excessive amount of wheat being imported into the United States from Canada.

The farmers told Ron Blackley, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Mike Espy's chief of staff, that the flood of Canadian grain is ruining their market and making it difficult to sell their 1993 wheat and barley crops. The farmers spoke with Blackley Feb. 1 on a conference call arranged by the National Farmers Union (NFU).

Farmers from Shelby and Conrad, Mont. for several weeks have blocked Canadian grain trucks from unloading at local elevators. North Dakota farmers joined the protest Feb. 3 by holding a demonstration in the port of entry town of Dunseith, N.D., aimed at highlighting the gravity of the situation.

"Producers are having to deal with the immediate effect of lower commodity prices, the inability to sell their grain because of congestion at local elevators and a lack of railroad transportation, the loss of production contracts to Canada and a myriad of other problems," said Leland Swenson, president of NFU. "The level of frustration increases dramatically when possible situations get bogged down in studies and reviews."

Specific points raised by the producers during the conference call include:

- The glut of Canadian grain has depressed cash market prices. In many cases, local prices are 30 cents a bushel below the county target price.

- Malting barley contracts for U.S. producers have not been renewed, but have been given to Canadian producers in order that manufacturers can take advantage of the Canadian government's transportation subsidies and the relatively cheap Canadian dollar.

- Canadian imports have a major impact on U.S. producer prices, as evidenced by the fact that wheat prices on the Minneapolis Exchange dropped 33 cents over the two weeks following the administration's Jan. 15 deadline to impose Section 22 volume restrictions on Canadian grain imports.

- Local farmers are unable to sell their grain to local elevators because they are full, and the capacity of the railroad system to move this volume of grain is inadequate.

- The decline in farm income is being felt in the nation's economy, affecting local businesses, state tax bases and driving up the cost of farm programs during a time when the U.S. government is under tremendous pressure to reduce its spending.

The producers also requested that the administration:

- Provide documentation that imported grain is being properly inspected. Farmers are concerned about inadequate inspection of Canadian grain, which could result in chemicals allowed in Canada but banned in the U.S. entering the American food supply.

- Provide documentation from USDA that Canadian grain is not being blended with U.S. grain and then exported under the Export Enhancement Program. Producers say that the excessive level of Canadian imports is costly to the U.S. government and ultimately to U.S. taxpayers because excess product must be exported.

"Mr. Blackley listened, took extensive notes and expressed his appreciation to the producers for their input, pledging to visit with Secretary Espy and report back to them," said Swenson. "Now we anxiously await their reply."

Imports of Canadian wheat have tripled since implementation of the U.S. Canada Free Trade Agreement. Imports of beef and veal have tripled, imports of peanut butter and peanut paste have increased by more than 500 percent, and sugar-containing product imports have shot up by more than 3,000 percent.

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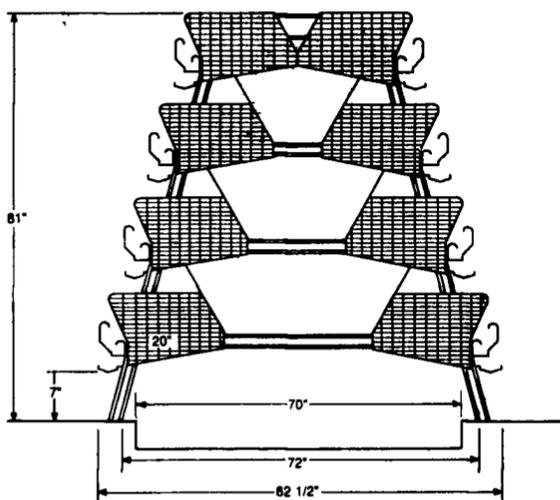
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