



## Foundation COMMENTARY

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I must admit I thoroughly enjoy shows. I showed cattle as a youth and made my way through graduate school coaching judging teams. Before I became heavily involved in breed association work, I judged a lot of shows from the smallest county shows to the national level across 15 states, four Canadian provinces, Brazil and Paraguay. I loved judging.

For me, growing up in Pennsylvania, the event at Louisville was the end-all, and there is nothing like seeing cattle parade across those green shavings. I have only missed the NAILE once in the last 29 years, and I have been lucky to have been part of the management committee that runs the National 4-H Livestock Judging Contest for the last 20 years.

I have been coming to Denver for many years, but new to me was the sheer excitement of the large pen and carload show the Limousin breed has. It was one of the most impressive shows I have ever been to. We had nothing near that scale when I worked at other breeds.

Shows have changed over the years to keep up with technology. For instance, we started incorporating performance information and scenarios into the National 4-H Livestock Judging Contest over 20 years ago. The same now goes for our Level I MOE Limousin shows where judges have access to EPDs. It is all part of keeping up with the times, and picking what you hope at the end of day comes close to the "ideal" animal for the breed. However, some people don't think we can have cattle with good phenotype and genotype, or in some way they are contradictory.

I would like to address this issue first by explaining what the equation for phenotype is:

### **GENOTYPE + ENVIRONMENT = PHENOTYPE**

With this said, we are always looking to evaluate the genotype of the cattle at our shows no matter what the trait. EPDs just happen to be an unbiased measure of the genotype of some of the traits evaluated at shows.

No matter what changes with shows, cattle first and foremost must be sound. To me, there is nothing more pleasing than to see a good bull or heifer striding out and placing its rear hoof in the same print it left with its front foot. There have been many judges over the years that have been masters at evaluating good structure; from one of my mentors, Herman Purdy, to contemporary judges like Randy Daniels and John Edwards.

It does bother me when I go to a show and I watch a judge place classes who really doesn't understand structure, even though he/she sometimes will talk structure on the microphone during the show.

I worry about the influence of steer shows and how it has become a fad to have cattle too straight on their rear legs (post-legged, a severe structural fault). In fact, they clip them tight against the back of a steer's cannon bone and fill the area above

the hock with hair to make them look this way. When this bleeds over into breeding shows, we have a problem because cattle need a good set to their hock to remain sound.

Feet are another thing that can be evaluated visually. The depth of heel and size of hoof can be seen, but unfortunately most show cattle have had their feet trimmed (environment), so the toes cannot be evaluated.

Volume is another thing that can be visually appraised. Depth and spring of rib are important for good doing cattle. The amount of fat, hair and fill can all enhance the appearance of capacity, especially in the hands of an experienced fitter, but a good judge can see through all that.

The show ring is a poor place to visually evaluate growth, except with the most obvious cases or with older heifers as it is hard to make a 1,300-lb. cow out of a 1,600- to 1,700-lb. heifer. The reason is show cattle are individually fed outside their contemporary groups by owners and herdsman of varying skills in varying climates. Growth EPDs give a much truer picture of an animal's genotype.

Muscling can be evaluated in the show ring quite well, but fat and hair can have a big impact on an animal's natural thickness. When I judged, I always viewed the cattle walking away from me looking for counterfeits. This is because an animal may appear thick down their top giving the impression of heavy muscling due to fitting and conditioning, but may track narrowly if light muscled. Of course today we have the Ribeye Area EPD which is an objective measure that can be weighed into a judge's decision-making process along with visual appraisal.

Scrotal circumference and shape, etc. are easily evaluated on bulls, but transmitting ability can also be evaluated on heifers with the Scrotal EPD.

There are certain traits like femininity that can only be evaluated visually. To evaluate the traits that cannot be seen like birth weight, milk, docility and marbling, a judge must use EPDs. Obviously, these unseen traits are vitally important to any breeding program and must be considered.

The show ring is, above all, about marketing one's program and the breed. Phenotype and genotype are not antagonistic, but part of an equation where judges are always looking to find the animals with the best genotype. Fitters are always trying to environmentally fill in the holes where an animal doesn't have the best genotype.

At the end of the day, we all should strive to have Limousin and Lim-Flex® winning shows that our best seedstock operations and most progressive commercial producers would all be proud to own and use from both a visual and an EPD perspective.