



Foundation COMMENTARY

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We are coming off of an electrifying junior show in Kansas, and moving into the all important fall performance reporting season. It is always fun to see the results of the previous year's matings when you wean calves. It also gives you a chance to evaluate how daughters of previous year's breeding decisions have fared.

Weaning is the most critical time for performance. It is the time when people typically report calving-ease scores, birth weights, weaning weights, docility scores, mature weights and body condition scores (BCS). Let's look at each of these and how they relate to performance.

Calving-ease scores are critical to help produce the calving-ease direct (CED) expected progeny difference (EPD). Birth weights are also used in the calculation of CED as well as the birth weight (BW) EPD.

Breeders report birth weights on a tremendously high percentage of their calf crop. In speaking with some of them, they have told me they estimate (guess) the birth weights of their calf crop. This is detrimental, given that researchers have studied the impact of estimating birth weights in the past and it does not result in the normal biological distribution you find in calves that are actually weighed. Thus resulting in faulty EPDs. The bottom line is if you are guessing the birth weights of your calves, you really shouldn't be reporting the data.

Weaning weights are the most important performance data a producer can send in. They are used as a co-variant for most of the other EPDs. It is also important to include the full contemporary group data to avoid the many problems with bias reporting (see page 60 of the 2010 Herd Reference Issue). Incomplete reporting affects yearling weights, milk and a host of traits.

It is also important to properly form contemporary groups (CG). NALF will do much of the work automatically, but if you have treated calves differently, creep fed some and not others; you must break them into different CG. One thing that really hurts producers is fitting their best calf for early shows. If they do this, they are obligated to put that calf into a separate CG, not allowing that animal's EPDs to reflect its potential performance. It is far better to skip those early shows and prepare your calves for the ring after they have a valid weaning weight in a full CG.

If you are eager to show your animal, this probably means you will have to creep feed all your calves, but it will assure your

top animals have high EPDs. You must remove showstring cattle, pen and carload bulls from CG post-weaning. Splitting post-weaning CGs is not nearly as big of a deal as keeping full weaning CGs. This is because they are not used as a co-variant for as many traits as they are for weaning weight.

The next item is chute scoring for docility. Surveys of commercial producers have shown that docility is the number one trait they are looking for, and let's face it, Limousin does not have the best reputation on this front. Therefore, it is imperative that producers collect chute scores so we can continue the great genetic trend we have had in the breed since NALF led the industry coming out with the first docility EPD in 1995. The scoring system is: 1) Docile 2) Restless 3) Nervous 4) Flighty (wild) 5) Aggressive and 6) Very Aggressive. You don't have to go to any extra work. Simply do your chute scoring when you work your calves at weaning.

Mature weights and body condition scores (BCS) are also important measures to make. They often aren't recorded at weaning, but should be done as close to weaning as is feasible. It is important to gather both mature weight and BCS, because one cannot be used without the other.

Our ultimate goal, via our strategic plan, is to develop a Maintenance Energy EPD. This would follow the concept of economically relevant traits in which we publish the trait of economic importance instead of several indicator traits. In this case, indicator traits would be mature weight EPD, BCS EPD, mature height EPD and milk EPD (animals with higher milk EPDs have higher maintenance requirements whether they are lactating or not), while the economically relevant trait is maintenance requirements.

This is why we are currently working with Colorado State University on a prototype for a mature cow Maintenance Energy EPD. Consistent data collection is the key, as this EPD relies on the reporting of the entire CG for mature weights, BCS and weaning weights.

Limousin is ready to make a huge impact in the cattle industry. Before we can, we must take care of our chores. This means taking your responsibility for breed improvement seriously by turning in performance data. The Limousin Strategic Plan identified that we need to maintain moderate birth weights, increase growth, improve docility and marbling. It is critical we do this if we expect to expand. This will take a breed-wide effort and I know we are up to the challenge. **LW**