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Board Commentary

by Joe Mushrush, 1st Vice President/ Dist. 6 Director - Great Plains

Maintenance Energy EPD

Recently, I was once again reminded that Red Angus is an industry leader in the development of tools to accurately describe genetics. With Maintenance Energy requirements consuming 70 percent of the energy expended in beef production, measuring these requirements has become the buzz at various breed associations and in the livestock press. Not long ago I was contacted by the editor of a cattle industry publication who was writing an article about how different breed associations measure and describe maintenance requirements. I jumped at the chance to explain the superiority of the Red Angus ME EPD and how it is calculated and used.

Sadly, in the spirit of political correctness, my pro Red Angus comments (true I might add), were edited to remove references to Red Angus advantage. Luckily, this forum exists where my comments can be expressed in their entirety.

The Red Angus Association of America was the first breed association to recognize a need to measure energy requirements. We began publishing a Maintenance Energy EPD (ME) in 2004. The ME EPD predicts differences in energy requirements of mature daughters of an individual and is expressed in Megacalories per month. Differences in Maintenance Energy requirements can easily translate into differences in feed required to maintain body weight. For example, offspring of a bull with a +20 ME EPD will require 20 Mcal more per month than offspring of a bull with a ME EPD of 0 (20-0=20). How does that affect Joe the Rancher? The energy content of average quality range forage is approximately 0.86 Mcal per pound of dry matter. This means that offspring of our +20 ME bull will need 23 pounds more dry matter per month than offspring of our 0 ME bull (20/0.86). Magnify that difference over 12 months in a 100 head cowherd and you have to come up with 14 tons of additional dry matter, or reduce your herd size accordingly.

The ME EPD is calculated using mature weight, milk, and body condition score (BCS). Breeders collect mature cow weights and BCS at weaning time. It should be noted that RAAA is the ONLY breed association that uses BCS in its calculations. RAAA recognizes that a 1250 lb BCS 7 cow is not the same animal as a 1250 lb BCS 3 cow. Other associations do not use BCS in the calculation which assumes that these two cows have identical energy needs. Obviously, this would not be the case. Periodically, I've had feedback that because BCS is a subjective measurement it compromises the integrity of the ME EPD. This is absolutely false. The Body Condition Scores are processed within contemporary groups. As long as a group of cows is evaluated by the same person in a consistent manner, it does not matter if what one person calls a 4 another person might call a 6. What is important is the differences in the observations within the contemporary group. It is no easier to misrepresent cattle with this system than with any other measure that is taken.

Red Angus chose to express the ME EPD as Mcal per month as it lets each producer plug in their own unique values for energy content of feed/range and the price of that feed/range rather than assume, as others do, that everyone's values are equal.

With the volatility cattle producers have been experiencing in everything from markets to input costs (pasture rental rates, fertilizer, fuel, feed costs, etc.) there has been a significant increase in awareness of this measurement by commercial bull customers. Four years ago when it was first available most producers ignored ME. Now I would say a majority of them use it to some extent in their selection process.

Maintenance Energy EPD is just one more tool that RAAA has given progressive commercial producers to help them manage volatility in inputs and make better genetic decisions. ■