

OLDS COLLEGE FEB. 1, 2006

## TOOLS FOR BUILDING BETTER COWS

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### DESERET RANCHES OF ALBERTA

- Cow-calf operation on the Milk River Ridge between Lethbridge and the US border.
- 110,000 acres primarily native rangeland comprising:
  - Knight ranch on the Southern slope 20 miles from Raymond
  - Bar K2 on the Westerly slope 18 miles from Cardston
- Run up to 6500 cows
- Historically Angus / Hereford cross - terminal Charolais
- 1994 selected from oldest Angus cows and commenced a seed stock herd raising all of our own bulls. First AI'd with Angus then followed with Hereford and Black Gelbvieh.
- Today between 600 to 700 hundred head are in our seed stock herd
- A portion of these are straight black Angus AI'd to the best black Angus.
- Another portion are black Angus AI'd to Hereford
- And a portion AI'd to black Gelbvieh
- The Angus/Hereford cross is then crossed with the Angus/Gelbvieh to make a 3way Controlled Composite
- The 3 way Composite  $\frac{1}{2}$  black Angus /  $\frac{1}{4}$  Hereford /  $\frac{1}{4}$  Gelbvieh are then used on our commercial cows.
- Heavy emphasis up till now has been placed on maternal qualities: easy calving, mothering, milking ability with as much selection as possible on yield and carcass traits.
- Possibly one of the biggest selection criteria was they have to live in our environment. Graze all winter at times – oat swath grazing.
- Raise all of our own bulls. 300 to 350 head are weaned and the real bottom end are cut off at this time.
- All calves are weighed accurately at birth as well as at weaning before being put on test.
- The past two years we have taken the opportunity to bring bulls to Olds, after they have completed their fall testing, as they have just done.

- We have chosen the top bulls from our on feed testing. A; AxH; AxG: AxHxG
- Future we will not test the AxHxG since we cannot follow them through on the commercial cows.
- We then use the top bulls back on our seed stock cows.
- When I say top bulls I don't necessarily mean top from any one test. They must have balanced EPD's
- Why Feed Efficiency:
  - post weaning calf RFI and cow RFI are highly correlated
  - lead to decrease in feed intake by replacements and mature cows. More cows run on same ground
  - 40% heritability
- Negative:
  - Over emphasis - use as a tool for selection - not the only tool must still survive the environment, have good conformation, calving ease, good udders, yield, carcass data and etc.
  - Cost – minimum for what gains are possible
- Where do we go from here:
  - Economic incentive – we believe so
  - How many do we test?
  - Where is the most valuable place to use them?
  - Can we measure improvement?
  - Where does RFI fit into selection criteria?
  - Top RFI are not necessarily top ADG, etc.
  - What is the relationship and how does it effect ADG, etc.
- At this point we will proceed to see what more we can learn and benefit from RFI

The opportunity to be a part of RFI and to take part on this program is much appreciated.