

Beef Business



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Taking Stock

I'm sure you all got mail asking you to fill out the U.S. Census this year. Between the mailbox, the TV ads, and the online pop up ads, it would have been difficult to miss their notifications! As our country gathers up data on our citizens, it's a good time to look at some of our own Shorthorn population data to learn a little more about the breed, as well as the Shorthorn breeder.

All the registration data in this report was compiled at the end of March. All information will pertain to the fiscal year (September to August), not the calendar year. For 2018-19, there were 15,351 head recorded. Currently, there are 8,668 head for 2019-2020.

Member Herd Size

I pulled a report from DigitalBeef that breaks down various metrics into brackets by number of registrations recorded. When studying how many members register 10 head or less each year, that comes out to 88.5% of our members. If you expand that criteria to 20 head or less, it includes 94.5% of membership. That huge portion of the membership that registers less than 20 head accounts for 54.7% of all registrations. The other 5% of our members account for the remaining 45.3%.

When looking at the list of the top 50 breeders by registrations, 4,149 head come from those breeders. That calculates to 27.1% of all the year's registrations. The number of calves registered by the top 50 breeders ranges from 42 to 260 head, with 14 members having over 100 recordings. This group averages out to 83 head per breeder, but that is carried by large herds. Only 17 of the top 50 registered 83 or more calves.

Sire Stats

When looking at the 2018-19 top 50 sires by registrations list, 2,902 calves were recorded out of these bulls. That calculates to just shy of 19% of the total calves recorded sired by the top 50 bulls. The top bull on that list was FREE K-KIM Hot Commodity, with 231 calves. These sires ranged from 32 calves to 231 calves, and only three bulls sired more than 100 head. Eighty-six percent of the top 50 bulls were AI-sire qualified with the proper genetic testing.

AI and ET Calves

Artificial insemination plays a significant role in the Shorthorn population. Last year (2018-19), 4,339 calves were recorded as AI sired, making up 28.2% of that year's calf crop. The numbers were very similar for 2017-18, with 4,553 calves making up 28.3% of the crop. So far this year, we are on pace with the previous two years in terms of number and percentage. Since the start of the 2019-2020 fiscal year, 2,503 AI calves have been recorded, making up 28.9% of all recorded calves.

There has been a slight decrease in the embryo transfer population within the breed. In 2017-18, 1,318 ET calves made up 8.2% of the calf crop. For 2018-19, that percentage dropped to 7.1% and 1,092 calves. So far, we are on a similar pace for 2019-20, with 7.2% of recordings as ET calves through March.

Data Collection

Nearly one out of three Shorthorns recorded has a weaning weight submitted. In 2018-19, there were 4,886 weaning weights recorded (32% of population). Those numbers are comparable to 2017-18 (5,310; 33%). For the current year, there have been 3,577 weaning weights submitted. While that number is behind the total to-date for last year, the percentage is significantly higher at 41.3%. In the past, the greatest portion of weaning weights come in October and November.

The yearling weight figures aren't as impressive. Last year, 2,185 head had a yearling weight submitted, which is 14.2% of the population. That is an increase from 1,683 (10.5%) the year before, but still a large drop from the weaning numbers. To date, we have 1,063 yearling weights for this year. That is a lower amount and percentage (12.3%) than 2018-19. Most yearling weights are taken from February to April.

Ultrasound data increased in volume (884 head vs 713) and percentage (5.7% vs 4.4%) in 2018-19 over the previous year. Numbers were similar in these two years up until March. Late spring 2019 saw an increase in submissions. I think the growth is due in part to the launch of the Genomically Enhanced Heifer Program last year. Our number of heifer ultrasounds certainly

increased over the previous year, as breeders had a financial incentive to both genomically test and ultrasound their replacements. This year, the pace of ultrasound submissions through March is off by about 100 head from the previous two years. Hopefully, there will be another spring surge in 2020.

Take Home Message

The first thing that stands out to me is that a large portion of our membership is what many consider a "small herd" breeder. That portion of our membership is what keeps ASA going. Without smaller herds of Shorthorns, we would not have most of our registrations, and we would lose almost all the "Shorthorn family" that breeders are so proud of. While we learned that one out of every five calves are sired by a sire on the top 50 list, we also learned that two out of three Shorthorn calves are sired by walking herd bulls. Even with AI and ET contributing a nice portion of our Shorthorn genetic pool, good herd bulls at home are as important now as they ever have been. Nobody wants a huge drop-off from their AI bull selections to their cleanup sire. Too much time and money are invested in a calf crop to give up quality with lesser herd sires.

From a data standpoint, I think we are doing ok on weaning weights. Of course, we always want more data into the system, but I do not think we should be ashamed of where we are percentage-wise for that trait. We can do better at retaining our data collection through yearling and ultrasound. Sure, the cost of ultrasound is a limiting factor. That is why ASA has a program in place (the Genomically Enhanced Female Project) to incentivize breeders to collect ultrasound data, as well as get discounted genomic testing on their replacements. The more data a breeder collects on their cattle, the better they can make them.

For the next 3 months, I will be doing a series of articles discussing performance data, EPDs, genomics, and their roles working together as part of our genetic evaluation of Shorthorn cattle. I'll be discussing the general importance of all these aspects, as well as taking a deeper dive into some of the traits that are often misunderstood or overlooked by breeders. 