

Beef Business



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ASA FAQs

With the ASA Annual Meeting coming up in about a month, we are gearing our brains for the biggest educational event we host for membership. I hope that a lot of you are making plans to join us in KC on December 5 for this event. With a theme of “Building Your Brand”, there will be plenty of information to be gathered on marketing, promotion, and improving your operation’s footprint in the marketplace. There are also plans for some virtual educational programming in the works, to make up for some lost time on the Annual Meeting schedule.

I decided to get into education mode a month early with this article. I will briefly address several topics. Some are tidbits of information you might not have known about, while others are answers to frequently asked questions. There is a bit of variety to the topics of discussion in this article.

1. The term “free by pedigree” is somewhat of a misnomer. If both parents are tested free of a genetic condition, I might be more comfortable with saying an animal is likely to be free as well. But we are working with nature, and in nature genes are always capable of a mutation. While the possibility of this happening is miniscule, it is possible. Describing an animal as “free by pedigree” because there are no tested carriers on the pedigree is not necessarily an accurate representation of that animal.

2. Having a WW EPD of a certain value does not equate to calves that will weigh a certain amount at weaning. We are supposed to use EPDs as a tool to compare genetic differences in two sires’ progeny, not use them as a predictor of an actual weight calves can achieve. There are too many factors that affect weights of a calf to be able to have an EPD as an actual weight predictor. Put ten genetically identical calves on ten

farms in ten states, and you will get back ten different actual weaning weights due to differences in environment, feeding programs, and management.

3. As a comparison tool, contemporary groups are very important to our genetic evaluation. I know that I preach the value of turning in the data from your herd, and that the actual measurements get emphasized. Actual measurements and data points are very important, but they are more important for what they give us when submitted in proper contemporary groups. As discussed in Point #2, EPDs are a comparative tool. Contemporary groups are where we make comparisons between individual performance and then use those differences to fuel movement in EPD calculation. While you may turn in a set of monster weaning weights, there will still be some calves whose WW EPD will be negatively impacted because it ranks below the group average. It’s important to remember that EPDs are a statistical calculation. The computer system doesn’t know a calf is the best-looking animal you ever raised, or that his mother is a 14-year old legend in your herd. It only knows what the data tells it and calculates from there.

4. Trying to determine parentage based off genotyped grandparents is not an accurate endeavor. If you have a calf whose sire does not have DNA on file, but his paternal grandsire does, there’s still a lot of missing pieces in the DNA marker puzzle. Simplified genetics teaches us that any mammal gets half of its genetic material from Mom and the other half from Dad. We can test for parentage when the parent is genotyped because we know that half of the puzzle. If we take it a step further, Mom and Dad both get half their genetic material from their parents (the grandsires and

granddams in this instance). If we try to test a calf to its grandsire, that calf usually shares about 25% of its DNA with that grandsire. Even then, we’re still missing half the DNA puzzle to match to that we would have testing to the actual sire.

5. DNA testing for twins should be done on hair cards. Because twins share blood while they are still in utero, this causes complications later on when trying to do a DNA test with blood or TSU samples. The samples come back inconclusive or contaminated more often via these methods, but are generally avoided by using a hair sample.

6. You can find a listing of tested homozygous polled animals in Digital Beef, as well as the other genetic conditions. If you go down the Digital Beef page on the left-hand side (the gray bar) below the menu with the red and green buttons, you will find a link that says “Genetic Conditions”. Clicking that will take you to a page with tabs for each of the genetic conditions that ASA tests for. Results of animals tested can be found by clicking on those tabs. The lists are available for males or females, so make sure you’re looking at the right list if you can’t find the bull you were looking for on the female list!

I hope you all have a blessed and happy Thanksgiving. It’s nice to have a reason to slow down and enjoy family and friends after a week at the North American and before Annual Meeting the first weekend of December. May you be surrounded by those that matter the most to you at your table, and I hope that you find time to make beef the main course for a meal or two once you’re tired of turkey! 🍴