

Beef Business



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The Digital World

Sometimes, we don't realize what we have until we experience someone else's viewpoint. Then we learn just how lucky we are. As prophetic as that might sound, I'm really commenting on online breed registry programs. If you have only ever dealt with Digital Beef, I can understand your frustrations with some of the nuances and quirks involved with the system we use at ASA. But if you have ever dealt with another breed system, I guarantee you know just how user-friendly Digital Beef is compared to other products out there on the market. What sets Digital Beef apart from others is the built-in herd management program capabilities and other features you don't find in other associations. While this may sound like the beginning of a paid endorsement for Digital Beef (If the owners of DB ever read this, I'm available for an endorsement deal), I rather would tell you about some things in the system you might not know about. I could write a short book on the herd management component, so for this column the focus will be on genetic and number-based features.

Some of you likely already know, but you can quickly determine how your animals rank in the Shorthorn population for the traits measured by EPDs. The rankings are broken out by percentiles. Think of the height and weight charts in a pediatrician's office and you will get the idea for how our percentiles work, only for a weaning weight EPD instead of the weight of your child. There are a couple tools available in Digital Beef that can help you determine these rankings. One way is to look for the % Rank row in an animal's EPD box on his Animal Info page in the registry. The % Rank is below the EPD value, the accuracy value, and the +/- change value in the box for that specific EPD. Using this information from the Animal Info page is quick and easy for you to get the information you need. If you are looking to dive deeper

into the numbers, the other option is to view the Percentile Ranks chart from the link on the left-hand menu. There are three charts published in the system. One is for active sires, another for active dams, and the third is for non-parent animals. All three of these charts vary from each other as they compare different segments within the Shorthorn population. The percentile charts offer an expanded view on where cattle rank for an EPD value within their segment of Shorthorns. Instead of just knowing where your animal ranks, you can see the difference between being in their current percentile and how far they are from moving up (or down) a bracket. The figures on these documents may not be for the statistically faint of heart!

A feature that is often underutilized in Digital Beef is the Progeny Calculator. When you are logged in to your account, the Progeny Calculator is under the "Tools" section of the menu. From there, you have Bull or Female options. The Bull option allows you to compare two bulls and their genetic impact across your entire female inventory. The calculator will output what percentile the offspring of that mating will land in for each EPD, highlighting outliers both positive and negative. It will also indicate to you if the mating is predicted to excel (or falter) in the Shorthorn population for growth or carcass traits. When using the cow function of the Progeny Calculator, all the same features apply. This variation allows you to run the predicted matings of one cow to your entire herd bull lineup, all the bulls listed in your semen inventory, all the Progeny Tested Sires in the ASA database, or all the Trait Leader bulls in the database. If you are looking for new genetics to flush your top donor or AI your leading cows, the Progeny Calculator helps you search for bulls that can increase genetic merit. I love the capabilities of this Progeny Calculator and the power to give

good information to breeders quickly and simply. Quite honestly, I would pay money for Erika and I to have access to this tool in the Hereford and Angus databases for our registered cows. Other similar tools do not compete with the quality of this one.

The Shorthorn breed has a great asset at its disposal with the Digital Beef program. It's more robust than other similar options in other associations and provides more than just an online outlet to register and transfer cattle. As always, if you have questions or would like more information, feel free to send me an email (matt@shorthorn.org).

I hope you and your loved ones have a safe and happy Thanksgiving holiday season. Eat beef! 🍖

