

BY THE NUMBERS

by Esther Tarpoff, director of performance programs

Yearling Measurements

Data points to collect on yearling-age calves.

For many spring-calving herds, you are gearing up for calving. As we look back on the calves born last spring, there are key data points to be collected at the yearling age. Many expected progeny difference (EPD) values use yearling measurements. Once animals pass the yearling age window, many of these phenotypes cannot be collected again for the animal.

Creating contemporary groups

Proper contemporary groups are the foundation for data entering the national cattle evaluation (NCE).

The size of a yearling contemporary group will never be larger than the birth or weaning contemporary group, because groups are established starting at birth. Bulls and heifers are separated and ratioed within sex. This means if an animal is in a single-animal contemporary group at birth, it will be in a single-animal contemporary group at weaning and yearling.

If one individual animal is sent to a bull test after weaning, that animal is removed from its weaning contemporary group and placed in a single-animal yearling contemporary group.

Weights, heights and scrotal circumferences

Yearling weights should be collected between 320 and 440 days of age. For animals to be eligible for the same contemporary group, weights must be collected within a three-day time frame. Yearling weights will not only be used in the calculation for yearling weight (YW) EPD, but also for analyzing yearling height (YH) EPD and scrotal circumference (SC) EPD.

Yearling weights outside of the normal age window will not be used for YH or SC EPD calculations. For example, groups with an average age of 482 days of age will not be used for YH or SC EPD calculations.

Yearling heights can be recorded during yearling weight collection to improve the accuracy of this EPD. Individual SC measures should also be collected at this time to be included in the NCE. Even if bulls will have a breeding soundness exam (commonly referred to as a BSE) closer to sale time, only scrotal measurements taken between 320 and 440 days of age are used for genetic prediction. If bulls are older than 440 days at the time of the BSE, these measurements cannot be used for predicting the SC EPD.

Docility scoring

Yearling docility scores are used to predict differences in docility in the population and should be collected in the same age window as yearling weights. Animals are scored on a 1-to-6 scale. A score of 1 represents cattle with mild dispositions and favorable temperaments, while a score of 6 describes very aggressive animals. These scores are designed to evaluate disposition differences when processing animals through the chute, including how animals enter, exit and react while being handled.

Foot scoring

The youngest an animal can be scored for claw shape and foot angle is yearling time. For many, this is the last time young bulls will be with their contemporary group to have scores included in the NCE.

When collecting foot scores, members should determine the combined worst foot for both claw shape and foot angle and score both traits on the selected foot. Scores range from 1 to 9 for both traits, with 5 being the ideal score.

Animals must be scored prior to any hoof trimming. It is important to score the feet as they naturally are, not how they can be shaped. If culling, score animals prior to culling.

Foot scores on mature animals are also encouraged. Groups of older bulls that remain with their contemporaries are valuable. Females remaining in the herd can be scored on an annual basis, and all scores over her lifetime can be used for better predictions.

Hair shedding

Hair shedding scores can be collected as early as the yearling age window. These scores are used to predict early hair shedding. This is scored on a 1-to-5 scale; with 1 representing no winter hair coat remaining, 100% shed out and a 5 representing a full winter hair coat, 0% shed out.

These scores should be collected when there is variation in hair shed during the months of April, May or June. Animals can be scored annually.

Ultrasound

While it may take place on a different day, ultrasound data must be collected in the yearling age window. Bulls must be scanned between 320 and 440 days of age, and heifers between 320 and 460 days of age. Scan weights must be taken within seven days of the technician's visit. Contemporary groups for ultrasound are based on the weaning contemporary group and weaning weights are required for ultrasound data to process.

DNA collection

Whether or not you choose to DNA profile your animals, having a DNA sample on hand for future testing is a good idea. Whether it would be used to sire-verify a commercial customer's calves in the future or if a female becomes a donor

and needs to acquire parentage SNPs (single-nucleotide polymorphisms) for calves to be registered, it is good to have access to a sample.

If you plan to genomic-test your sale offering, remember to submit your samples at least four weeks prior to the sale book deadline to allow time for processing.

Data collection takes time and effort. You as Angus breeders continue to collect and submit phenotypes to the Association to have the best genetic selection tools for you and your customers. **AJ**

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Editor's note: If questions arise for data collection, contact the Performance Programs department.

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