

Buying Cattle: Develop a Plan
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If your mailbox is anything like mine this time of year it is being taken over by bull sale catalogs. These catalogs represent bull and female sale offerings from across the country. Every catalog touts the strengths of their genetics, and why you as a producer should purchase these genetics.

Buying a new herd bull or a foundation female is a daunting task for the seedstock producer and commercial cattlemen alike. These purchasing decisions can leave a large imprint on the ultimate success or failure of our operations. Research by Dr. Bob Weaber of Kansas State University indicates that your herd sire contributes greater than 87 percent of the gene flow over time to your cattle operations.

This genetic influence places a high degree of pressure on your breeding decisions, so how do you effectively manage these risks?

Spend time developing a game plan for your purchases by writing down your goals and a job description for your new bull or female. For example, what resources are available to you and your operation, and more importantly, what are their limitations?

Remember that each operation is different, just because something works for your neighbor across the fence, does not mean it will work for you.

Develop a list of your management goals and your marketing strategy as these areas directly impact the type of genetics you purchase. For example, does it make financial sense to develop your own replacement females or purchase them from an outside trusted source? Are you marketing your calves at weaning, retaining ownership, or merchandizing them in other ways?

Be willing to evaluate these goals often because just like Kansas weather, the strategy that makes the most sense for your operation will change and adapt as time passes.

Utilize the goals you set for yourself to identify and purchase cattle that moves your operation forward in a positive manner.

Whether you are purchasing cattle through a formal sale, private treaty, or breeding cattle through Artificial Insemination, I urge you to develop a strong relationship with your seedstock supplier. Doing so allows you to determine if their genetics and goals match up with yours. If you share a similar vision, success is more likely to follow.

In addition to evaluating genomic values and pedigree information, make sure to visually appraise cattle you are interested in purchasing. Visual appraisal is a critical component to accurately determine how certain genetics are interacting with the environment. Evaluate structural soundness, body condition, and if possible, other animals that are closely related to better understanding the consistency of genetics.

Making purchasing decisions can be scary at times, but if you establish and continually update operational goals, and utilize these goals to develop a purchasing strategy, it doesn't have to be.