

When choosing cattle for your herd, which EPDs do you pay the most attention to? That is, which EPDs do you deem “most important” in your cattle? The four most popular EPDs that are selected for are yearling weight, weaning weight, birth weight, and milk. This week we will discuss the benefit of selecting for multiple EPDs at a time, and the risks associated with only selecting for one EPD.

The wisest management step a producer can take when choosing EPDs is to study various EPDs and learn how they complement or detract from one another. Constantly choosing for just one EPD with no regards for any of the others will ultimately create a negative outcome in your operation. Take, for instance, the following examples. Although selecting for high milk EPDs may result in calves with higher weaning and yearling weights, an increase in nutrient requirements for the cow will also occur due to the increase in the cow’s milk production. Likewise, selecting for high weaning or yearling weight EPDs will also cause an increase in nutrient requirements of calves due to their increased size. Low birth weight EPDs may cause lighter calves at birth, but these low birth weight calves will likely also be smaller at weaning and as yearlings if other EPDs are not taken into account.

Choosing EPDs is like picking cattle based on physical traits. Selecting for only one EPD and completely disregarding others is as dangerous as picking only the cattle that are heavy muscled, for example. Though this is a good trait, not just one singular trait should be chosen, or your herd may develop into a group of heavy muscled cattle that don’t produce much milk. Similarly, if cattle are only chosen because they are good milkers, you may soon be producing good milking cattle that do not breed back efficiently. This is why it is best to choose the EPDs that best complement each other and help you reach your goals for the operation. Below is a list of traits that are negatively affected when the traits to the left of the arrow are consistently selected for:

- high milk production → heavy muscling, and reproduction
- heavy muscling → heavy birth weights, and milk production
- high yearling weights → heavy birth weights
- low birth weights → reduced weaning and yearling weights

If you have any questions about EPDs, or how to read them, please contact us.