

# Industry Insight



**Tom Saxe**

*Saxe Farms, Thompsonville, IL*

A distinguished panel of current or former extension agents, who also happen to be Simmental breeders, discuss their interaction with cattle breeders.

*Coordinated by Paulette Cochenour*

## **How do your services differ between full-time cattle producers and small herd owners?**

Our desire was to help anyone requesting assistance. As an area livestock educator most of my inquiries came from smaller operations because of two reasons. First, there were more of them, and second, most of the bigger operations knew more about solving their problems than I did. I could pretty well handle the small herd questions. I mean, when the need is as basic as a bullpen and/or handling facilities, I was "good to go"! Larger producers sometimes had more technical questions for which I might solicit the support of a piled higher and deeper type from campus.

## **From a genetic trait standpoint, which traits are most important to producers in your area?**

Our area is mostly cow/calf. Only a few visionaries concern themselves much with carcass traits. The answer to the question has evolved over the years. Early in my career we really worked hard on developing a performance ethic. I'm inclined to think this is still paramount. Then everybody seemed to discover the easiest way to accomplish the performance goal was to pick the tallest one. Well, several breeds including Simmental began to really take it on the chin for too big at birth. So, lower birth weight became the most important trait in the minds of bull buyers and still remains very important. At the same time, many buyers walk into a pen of bulls with the right selection criteria in mind, but still leave with the biggest, finest looking specimen of the group! Go figure? Currently, here in the midwest, the most important trait is BLACK! That is an unfortunate circumstance brought on by a tremendous marketing program from the American Angus Association (hey, give them credit!), the flame of which was fanned by the people at the market place.

## **Many breeds have developed indexes to compare the potential dollar value differences between animals. How is the "technological transfer" going toward getting producers interested in using indexes?**

As per the above discussion . . . single trait selection is the easiest. Even so, because of the nature of the beast we work with, it takes a long of time to see results (the only people needing more patience than cowmen are foresters). We actually overwhelm many of our beef producers with information now. Indexes are the most useful tools for accomplishing long-term goals. Considering the average age of our cowboys, there ain't enough time left to get there. Technological transfer is slow. Operations with younger partners are more apt to adapt.

## **Considering disposition, performance, fertility and carcass potential, how are SimGenetics doing toward contributing to your clients' success?**

Disposition as a whole, is outstanding. There are obviously some individual exceptions which are easy to solve. Ship 'm. Performance is still good, but seems to have declined as many have put selection pressure on lower birth weight and reduced frame size. Re-breeding can be a problem in certain environments where milk EPDs have been stressed too much. Early sexual maturity is exceptional in the moderate to smaller frame sized Simmentals and their crosses. I think the sky is the limit for carcass potential of Simmental and Simmental crossbreeds. Pick your niche and go for it. We do need to work on helping people understand that tenderness and time on feed are the most important influences toward an enjoyable consumer experience. Our biggest problem . . . is sound feet.

## **Few management decisions hold greater potential for improving enterprise profit than crossbreeding. How do you motivate your producers to take advantage of this financial benefit?**

Implanting is the management procedure with the highest percent return on investment. But, crossbreeding gives the "biggest bang for the buck." There's more total dollars returned. My motivational endeavor is a question to commercial cow/calf producers. "Has your bull supplier helped you design a manageable crossbreeding program? If not, he's done you a disservice. You need to get bulls somewhere else!"



**Mike Mallett**  
*Mallett Simmentals, Lampasas, TX*

In some aspects the operations are different, but there are similarities as well. Many of the small herd owners are looking for "convenience" traits. While many of the larger producers look for similar traits they also incorporate economic traits into their equation. Direction is provided to assist each producer type with goal development for their specific operation.

When it comes to bull selection encouragement is given to both groups to select quality animals from a progressive seed stock producer that has performance records and EPDs and now Indexes for the traits they desire. Should females be purchased and not raised producers should seek out reputable suppliers or seed stock producers so they will have some knowledge of the animals in which they consider to purchase.

The small herd owners look seriously at CE and BW traits/EPDS as they generally work off the farm/ranch. By selecting for these traits they are trying to reduce problems with which they do not have time to cope. The larger operators, also, select for CE and BW for the same reason, but also place emphasis on WW as they are selling pounds and these pounds convert to income. This is a large part if not their total income. Neither type of operator seldom take their cattle to the feed-yard. Some of the producers are selling in co-mingled pre-conditioned sales being offered in our area to increase profits. Both groups consider disposition in their selection, and are placing more emphasis on this trait than they did 10-15 years ago.

Let me first say that the indexes developed by ASA are some of the most practical and easy to understand. The ASA indexes have done a good job of summarizing traits. With indexes being relatively new, producers in my area have not fully implemented their use. Many producers are now just understanding and utilizing EPDs. As more promotion of indexes and ways to use them continues I believe they will become more popular. Indexes are a tool that can simplify the selection process, and reduce the confusion of all the numbers (EPDs) currently available.

I would encourage breed associations to promote them with producers through all means available to them, including land grant universities and keep the indexes practical and not develop indexes for every trait. Also, I hope the land grant universities and seed stock producers promote their use.

Within recent years SimGenetics are again gaining favor with commercial beef producers. Producers have observed the easy handling of the cattle, and the big draw is the added performance they provide. Producers utilizing SimGenetics are noting increased weaning weights. Their falling weaning weights is what prompted their interest in SimGenetics and they have been pleased with the results. Although most of the producers of which I am in contact do not directly obtain carcass data they phenotypically see the carcass potential of SimGenetics. Order buyers and sale barn managers have also taken note of this. Producers/buyers realize that muscle is pounds and in turn dollars. In recent years SimGenetics have made tremendous strides in improving marbling, and as the breed progresses more beef producers will become aware of this most important economic trait. The ASA has some valuable carcass information from the Illinois Project, and they need to promote this with feedlots, packers, and those producers that feed their cattle.

Producers retaining females which carry SimGenetics influence recognize their maternal traits: fertility and added milk. Both of these traits relate to additional income.

Using SimGenetics affords producers flexibility in cattle production.

Within recent years there is renewed interest in crossbreeding. This is due in part from producers using a single breed for several generations, and noticed their weaning weights declining. From this observation producers saw the need to again crossbreed to improve their bottom line. SimGenetics is a logical crossbreeding choice as they increase performance, carcass merit, and maternal traits.

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# Industry Insight

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**Gerry Thompson**  
*Southern Livestock Service, Ralph, AL*

## **How do your services differ between full-time cattle producers and small herd owners?**

Alabama is generally considered to be a cow-calf state, and most of our cattle producers fall into the "small herd" category (30 brood cows or less). While it is not unusual for me to work with a full-time cattle producer, by far the greatest amount of my time is spent with cattle producers whose primary income is derived from another source other than farming. In general, I probably spend more time with small herd owners in areas directly relating to production (herd health, nutrition, design of cattle handling facilities, etc). With the full-time producers more of my efforts are directed at marketing and making genetic improvements within the herd. The greatest volume of my educational efforts is directed at improving our forage production and utilization, with little difference seen in that educational effort between large and small producers.

## **From a genetic trait standpoint, which traits are most important to producers in your area?**

It depends upon the producer's goals. Given that I do work in an area where many of the producers are not full-time cattlemen, calving ease and disposition are two of the most important traits to be considered. Since handling facilities are frequently minimal, and skilled labor availability is often limited, good dispositions are an absolute "must have" and calving difficulties need to be as minimal as possible. We are primarily in the business of producing feeder calves, with most cattle sold at weaning, so weaning weight is also a strong consideration. Many cattle producers in this area also develop their own replacements, so maternal traits are of importance. We do have quite a few producers retaining ownership of their cattle through the feeding stage, and those producers frequently demand strong carcass traits in the seedstock they select.

## **Many breeds have developed indexes to compare the potential dollar value differences between animals. How is the "technological transfer" going toward getting producers interested in using indexes?**

Cattle producers in this area have become increasingly more aware of the tools that are available to them when making their seed stock selection decisions. EPDs have become widely accepted by most cattle producers, but selection indexes have not as yet become widely used by the seed stock buyers in my area. As superintendent of the North Alabama Bull Evaluation Center, we make a conscientious effort to supply all of the various indexes that the breed associations make available to us, but so far I have not seen a general acceptance of their use among my clientele.

## **Considering disposition, performance, fertility and carcass potential, how are SimGenetics doing toward contributing to your clients' success?**

SimGenetics have been used fairly extensively in this area for many years. After losing some ground to other breeds in the past, SimGenetics have again become increasingly popular. To continue gaining popularity in this area, I feel that SimGenetic seedstock producers need to continue to place more emphasis on producing cattle that are structurally sound and with greater growth potential to weaning age when compared with some of the other breeds

## **Few management decisions hold greater potential for improving enterprise profit than crossbreeding. How do you motivate your producers to take advantage of this financial benefit?**

The move to an increasingly "black hided" cow herd in our area, and the increased awareness of some of the potential premiums available through some of the branded beef programs associated with other breeds, have caused many of my clientele to lose track of the benefits of crossbreeding. I do think, however, that many of these producers are beginning to see a decrease in the productivity of their cattle and are coming back to the advantages that can be available to them through a planned crossbreeding program. I have seen an increased demand for Simmental-composite cattle in my area, and I believe that trend is likely to continue in the coming years. I am a firm believer in the benefits of a planned crossbreeding system, and I always make an effort to advance that position with any cattle producer I work with.

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**Marc King**  
*Marvin Frank Farm, Big Timber, MT*

**How do your services differ between full-time cattle producers and small herd owners?**

In Sweet Grass County the majority of the producers are still running over 100 head herds. However, over the past five years we have experienced an increase in smaller herds. It has been somewhat challenging in that the small herd owners are typically looking for one sire that can provide many traits.

**From a genetic trait standpoint, which traits are most important to producers in your area?**

Currently, calving ease and weaning weight are the two biggest priorities. We have, over the past five years, seen a marked increase in the number of producers concerned about carcass traits, and longevity of the females is fast becoming a priority.

**Many breeds have developed indexes to compare the potential dollar value differences between animals. How is the "technological transfer" going toward getting producers interested in using indexes?**

It is going moderately slow. Many producers are still trying to figure out how to implement the growing number of EPDs published. There are however, several producers that have welcomed the indexes, and are using them well in their genetic selections.

**Considering disposition, performance, fertility and carcass potential, how are SimGenetics doing toward contributing to your clients' success?**

In our county, I would say that SimGenetics are making an impact with those producers who are willing to use them. In this county, most producers are still very focused on the Angus breed.

**Few management decisions hold greater potential for improving enterprise profit than crossbreeding. How do you motivate your producers to take advantage of this financial benefit?**

As I said in the previous question, it is hard in this county to get producers to leave the Angus mold. However, research on crossbreeding and the benefits from several decades ago has helped to move some producers toward the use of crossbreeding. I also think that the cost of these replacement cattle the last couple of years has helped to get some producers back into the crossbreeding game to help the longevity and performance of their cattle herds. ♦