

HOW ARE WE DOING?

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Simmental... The Perfect Complement

As an enthusiast of cattle and a student of the beef industry, one of my favorite pastimes is listening to stories of purebred and commercial cattlemen, college professors, and other seasoned veterans of the beef industry about the excitement that surrounded the importation of new breeds of beef cattle from Europe during the late 1960s through the early 1990s. The anticipation and enthusiasm for breeds like Simmental, Charolais, Limousin, Chianina, Maine-Anjou, Gelbvieh, and others must have been a thrill. That time was unique and perhaps as influential on the beef industry as the introduction of the first Angus and Hereford bulls into herds of Longhorn cows more than one hundred years earlier. Yet in 2008, approximately 40 years after their introduction, some of these breeds are struggling to survive the challenges of the 21st century beef business.

For more than a decade now, increased market share by the Continental breeds has been opposed by many factors. These include, but are not limited to, calving difficulty, large mature size, variable hide color, horns, compromised maternal traits, insufficient marbling, temperament and, in some cases, inadequate collection and reporting of performance data that results in limited accuracy of genetic predictions.

Despite these generally accepted criticisms of Continental breeds, the Simmental breed has endured quite well and has experienced considerable growth in recent times. According to the National Association of Animal Breeders, the umbrella organization for the major artificial

insemination (AI) organizations, sales of Simmental semen by AI companies were up 7% and custom freezing was up almost 70% in 2007 compared to 1997. During the same period, sales of semen by AI organizations were down 15% for Charolais, down 53% for Gelbvieh, and down 83% for Limousin.

Many inherent advantages of Simmental cattle are responsible for this success. One of the most intriguing is the recognition of the opportunity to complement influential maternal breeds in crossbreeding systems. Simmental breeders have responded to market signals more aggressively and with more expedience than any other Continental breed. Many segments of the beef industry are rewarding the tremendous foresight and discipline of Simmental breeders with increased demand for its purebred and composite bulls and females. A visit to the herd of a progressive Simmental breeder will likely evidence cows that are moderate sized and easy fleshing, have well-attached udders, and are polled, docile, and bred back while raising a heavy calf. This scenario is more common than ever in Simmental herds and breeders should be commended for identifying and propagating animals with outstanding maternal function.

The progress in the Simmental breed reaches beyond the cowherd. Several years ago, the ASA membership chose to embrace the carcass movement by selecting cattle with superior carcass genetics, including tenderness. Across-breed EPD adjustments published in 2008 by the Beef Improvement Federation indicates that, compared to Angus, Simmental cattle are

heavier at weaning and yearling and produce a leaner carcass with more muscle. In addition, the SimChoice 70:70:0 program has been a huge success for the breed and it will leave lasting contributions to the entire beef industry.

Through the ASA progeny carcass testing program, Simmental breeders have demonstrated their advantage as a perfect match to existing British maternal breeds in creating near ideal carcass cattle. Carcass data compiled from the ASA progeny carcass testing program has demonstrated that calves sired by SimAngus bulls bred to crossbred commercial cows produced carcasses that aligned more closely to the 70:70:0 specifications than calves sired by either purebred Simmental or purebred Angus bulls.

The improvements made in Simmental cattle are a success story in producing cattle that are in demand and valuable from conception to consumption. The bonus is that they are a perfect complement to Angus and Red Angus for crossbreeding. As John Welch, CEO of Spade Ranches, referenced in a previous edition of 'How Are We Doing', 30 years ago crossbreeding with Simmental cattle was probably more about making rapid changes in type than it was to take advantage of breed complementarity and hybrid vigor. With input costs at unprecedented highs, crossbreeding Simmental with Angus, Red Angus, and other maternal breeds has important economic consequences. Simmental and SimAngus cattle have advantages that are arguably more valuable today than any time in history.