

Fall Means Bull
Buying Opportunities

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Cooler temperatures, harvesting of peanuts and cotton, and new calves on the ground in some parts of Alabama suggest it is time to assess bull needs for the upcoming breeding season. There are many sale rings gearing up for the bull sale season, including several BCIA sponsored sales.

However, producers should not simply buy any bull. Producers need to do their homework before coming to the sale. Here are some of the questions which need to be answered prior to coming to the sale:

1. How many bulls do I need? This will depend on how many cows you have and the age of the bulls you are purchasing. The table below provides general guidelines on the number of bulls to number of females needed.

<u>Bull's Age</u>	<u>Number of Females</u>
12-15 months	10 to 12
15-18 months	12 to 18
18-24 months	18 to 25
24 months and older	25 to 35

2. How will these bulls complement my cows? Commercial cattle producers need to know strengths and weaknesses of each breed and how different breeds will work together to make a better end product (weaned calf, stocker calf, carcass, replacement heifer). Commercial cattle producers need to maintain at least 66% of individual and maternal hybrid vigor in their herds to really take advantage of crossbreeding.

3. What the average EPD values are for the specific breeds you are interested in and what the minimum EPD values are you will accept in a bull. For a cattle producer to know what EPD values are important for the herd or what EPD values are acceptable, producers must know what product they are trying to produce and market. Given this information, producers will be able to set EPD value minimums and maximums. For example, if a commercial producer is not keeping replacement heifers, the milk EPD value is unimportant. This may present the producer with a selection of bulls that other producers are not interested in because of lower than breed average milk EPD values. If a producer is keeping replacement heifers, the milk EPD and maternal calving ease EPD values are important values and must be examined. Study the sale catalog and pick out bulls you want to look at sale day before you arrive at the sale. Also, remember that EPD values are a much more accurate judge of genetic potential than just using actual or adjusted weights or ratios.

Breeding System	BW EPD value	WW EPD value	Milk EPD value	YW EPD value
Rotational	L-M	M-H	Depends	M-H
Terminal	L-H	H	n/a	H
1st Calf Heifer	L	M	M	M

Sire Replacement Heifers	L-M	M-H	Depends	M-H
L=Low EPD value; M=medium or moderate EPD value; H=high EPD value; Depends=EPD value dependent on cow herd				

4. How much do you have to spend? Know your upper limit and stick with that limit. Don't let the excitement of the sale allow you to spend more than you have in the budget.

However, there is still a lot of work to be done once you reach the sale site. Some bulls on your list may be culled once you see what he looks like. Producers need to make sure the phenotype (or visual appraisal) of the animal is what you desire. Producers should at least check:

1. Overall conformation, including muscling
2. Scrotal size and shape
3. Attitude/ disposition
4. Feet and leg structure. Feet and legs are very important.

Look to see if an animal is sickle-hocked or post-legged. Make sure the animal is not pigeon-toed or splay-footed. And look for screw claw (sometimes called corkscrew claw). Screw claw is approximately 40% heritable....so if a bull or female has screw claw, their offspring probably will too. It can usually be managed with trimming, but is heritable.