Canadian Luing Cattle Association Newsletter

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Message From The Secretary

Iain Aitken

Welcome to our 2021 Winter Newsletter. Let's hope the mild winter we've had so far will continue as it makes life so much more comfortable for man and beast alike!

2020 again saw strong demand for our breed with another increase in bull sales and a few more females sold to new and expanding herds. We were also able to export 4 bulls to American customers, marking a return to that marketplace after a break of around 25 years.

We thank you all for your purchases and extend a warm welcome to the Luing world to the following first time purchasers:

Michael Ball, Sexsmith, Alberta
Randy Mackney, Two Hills, Alberta
Cameron Barnes, Benito, Manitoba
Riley Kemp, Cartwright, Manitoba
Forwood Livestock, Wood Mountain, Saskatchewan
Bluff Creek Ranch, Glentworth, Saskatchewan
Briann Larson, Kimball, South Dakota
Dennis Hoyle, Roscoe, South Dakota
Diamond X Ranch, Lysite, Wyoming.

Luings For Sale.

A good selection of rising two year old bulls from the Medicine River and Greywood herds. Located Belmont, Manitoba. Trucking can be arranged across Canada and bulls can also be tested for export to the USA.
Luing semen is also available, please see our website www.luingcattle.com or contact the Secretary for further information.

New President Appointed

At our December 2020 AGM Glenn Webber who has served as breed President for the last 5 years stepped down. We thank him for his service and are happy to introduce Jamie Dick as our new President.
Jamie supplied the following biography to introduce himself to Luing breeders and customers:

“My wife, Barb and I ranch on my Grandad's homestead in north-east Saskatchewan near Nipawin, with about 140 cows. We both had jobs off the farm, Barb as a teacher, and I was working at the Melfort Research Station. After BSE we enrolled in a Holistic Ranch Management course which changed our approach to handling our herd. Barb retired at this time and I had been on the farm full time since 1997, and we devoted all our focus to the enterprise. All the cattle moved out of the corrals; now graze for extended periods, bale graze in the winter, often using snow as a water source, and calve with minimal intervention on 15 acres of grass in April. With our new approach to ranching the demands on the cows changed. Our herd had been Gelbvieh, Angus and Tarentaise cross which did well on the maternal side but didn't perform as well as needed on the hardiness scale. When we saw the articles on the Luing breed we believed they would be what we needed to improve our herd. The Luing bulls we purchased were great and the cross calves performed and sold very well. Since we are not as young as we used to be we decided a reduction in cow numbers and replacing them with fewer purebred Luings would be our semi-retirement agenda. With that in mind we have been purchasing some purebred females and have become involved in the Luing Association. The purebreds are requiring some adjustment in our management and expectations as compared to the commercial cattle. We are excited to try and develop animals whose offspring can fit into western Canada commercial operations.”

Beckton - Foundation Herd of the Red Angus Breed

Iain Aitken

A breeding program which has long intrigued me is that of Beckton Red Angus based at Sheridan, Wyoming. The herd was founded by Waldo Emerson Forbes and his wife Sally in 1945 by purchasing the best red calves from black Angus herds across the country.

The Forbes intention at the outset was to create a new breed and, like the Cadzow's Luing breed, their Red Angus was designed with commercial cattlemen in mind.

The Red Angus breed evolved from this single herd and in 1954 the Red Angus Association of America was formed. Waldo Forbes was elected the first President but sadly he passed away a year later. His wife Sally and their descendants have carried on the breeding program with 2020 marking their 75th annual sale with 230 bulls sold.

The Forbes 15,000 acre ranch lies at the foot of the Bighorn Mountains but the cows trail up to their summer range which is between 7000 - 10,500 feet above sea level. With over a thousand purebred cows this ranch has actually a heavier stocking rate than is typical in the area but the cows are still expected to live year-round on grass alone, only supplemented with hay if the weather conditions dictate it. Like the Luing breed, tough environmental conditions shaped the Red Angus breed at its outset.

The Beckton goal is to produce breeding stock with increased performance but this does not mean maximising weight and size as they feel the industry has already reached the upper limits of carcass size for both packers and consumers. They strive instead to increase performance relative to calving and weaning percentages, more performance relative to cow maintenance requirements and pounds of calf/acre efficiency.

A Typical Beckton Pair

Having recorded performance and slaughter data on their herd for 75 years gives Beckton a unique perspective. Their assessment on the industry around them is that any gains achieved in the feedlot sector due to increased growth have been overwhelmed by increased cost of production in the cow/calf sector. Proof of this, and that the efficiency of the industry as a whole hasn't improved over the last 40 years, can be demonstrated by the following figures: Between 1978 and 2019 the average US slaughter steer weight increased by 28% while the average cow weight increased by 31%. In contrast the average Beckton slaughter steer increased in weight by 27% over the same time period but their average cow weight dropped by 5%. The average mature cow (5+ years) in the Beckton herd weighs 1100-1125lbs at weaning. Despite their smaller cow size the average

Beckton bull's Yearling Weight EPD is +80 which is average for the breed.
Throughout their history the Beckton herd has been selected for growth while restricting birth weight which has prevented the cow size creep to which most other purebred herds/breeds have succumbed. They avoid using 90lb birth-weight bulls as they know they lead to 1400lb cows. Their average birthweight from mature cows is only 78lbs and to maintain the calving ease trait all potential herd bulls are proven by first being used on heifers. Almost all the females are bred in single sire groups of 45-50 cows and very few outside bulls are ever used in the herd as almost no-one else is using the same selection criteria.

The enormous influence the Beckton herd has had on the Red Angus breed is reflected by the following whole-breed performance statistics.
The "herd builder index" (best measure of overall commercial profitability) ranks 17 out of the top 20 bulls in the breed as either Beckton bulls or Beckton sired. For the "Herd Stayability" trait Beckton is #1 in the breed with 7 out of the top 10 bulls either Beckton or Beckton sired. For calving ease Beckton is #1 in the breed with 18 out of the top 20 bulls either Beckton or Beckton sired. Beckton is also #1 in the breed for the "Low maintenance energy" trait.

It impresses me that this herd has stuck to its original goals and objectives while the breed as a whole has followed a similar path to most others by breeding for ever increasing growth and mature size without considering the commensurate increase in inputs necessary to sustain them.

How Much "Bull Development" Can Ranchers Afford?

Iain Aitken

One thing that has always puzzled me about the beef cattle industry is the over-development of purebred breeding bulls sold into the commercial sector. At almost any bull sale it seems the biggest and fattest specimens bring the highest prices yet their buyers often complain later how poorly these bulls hold up under ranch conditions. In some cases these over-developed bulls only manage one breeding season before either dying or being culled. Given that the cow/calf sector traditionally operates on extremely low margins this would appear to be a tremendous financial drain on already fragile businesses.

As the genetic potential of a bull is fixed at point of conception surely it would make sense to then simply develop that animal to maximise its life-span and the number of calves it would sire? Yet in a typical purebred herd a huge amount of time and money is spent beyond the point of conception on activities that are not conducive to attaining these goals.

Winter calving in heated barns is followed by creep feeding and then after weaning onto high-energy feedlot type rations. Many bulls are performance tested on rations designed to promote gains of 4lbs a day or more. If the bulls are marketed through a public auction they will often also be washed, shampooed, clipped and have their feet trimmed. None of these are beneficial to the animal's health, longevity or ability to breed cows. Indeed most of these practices are hugely detrimental.

A forage raised Luing bull

EBLEX, a division of the UK Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board showed in their "Fit for Purpose Bulls - a Blueprint for Breeders" paper that feeding large quantities of high-energy feeds can have the following effects:

* Reduced bone strength and density leading to long term joint issues.

* Smaller, less dense muscles containing higher levels of fat leading to early fatigue and reduced endurance when bulls work.

* Lead to a weaker skeleton with less robust connective tissues and poor cartilage development.

* Abnormal foot growth and bleeding/ haemorrhages within the hoof, resulting in lameness and poor mobility.

* Excessive fat around the neck of the scrotum increasing scrotal temperatures which reduces sperm quality and testosterone levels which, in turn, decrease libido.

* Increased risk of acidosis where the lining of the rumen wall can be damaged, leading to liver abscesses and possible sudden death.

* Damaged kidneys where urinary calculi or urolithiasis can occur, particularly in diets poorly balanced for minerals.

Apart from the directly detrimental effects of over-feeding bulls to attain a huge weight at an early age there are also the knock-on effects. As most ranchers retain their own replacement heifers it is important that they have animals that will excel on the forage resources of their ranch. Using bulls that have been developed on high energy diets rather than forage diets forgoes the opportunity to identify those most likely to sire forage efficient daughters.
Another way that over-developed bulls cost the rancher comes down to simple economics. A forage developed

bull might last twice as long as one that has been developed on a high energy diet. Getting 6 crops of calves from a bull versus 3 obviously halves the bull cost per calf produced. In addition though the forage developed bull will also cost less to maintain, breed more cows per season and possibly cost half the price of a show ring bull so the benefit to the rancher increases exponentially. It would not be unreasonable to expect that using an appropriately developed bull, raised on forage would sire calves for a quarter of the cost per calf that a bull over-developed on a high energy ration would. This of course assumes the two bulls are of the same genetic value to begin with. As I mentioned earlier though the animal's genetic potential is fixed at conception and it seems a lot of the development/ presentation related activities are designed to convince a buyer that the bull is something he is not. This was likely the reason Denis Cadzow, one of the founders of our breed, decreed that there would be no competitive showing of Luings because 50% of the prize winning was due to the influence of the stockman (through feeding and presentation) and only 50% a reflection of the animal's quality. He was clear from the outset that bulls should be presented in natural condition - "*not the fat condition associated with pedigree sales"* and that bulls "*must be in breeding condition the day after the sale."*

This advice was given over 50 years ago and to a large extent has fallen on deaf ears. The financial costs incurred by ranchers as a result must be astronomical.

Canadian Luing Cattle Association

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