

Jumping Through the Hoops: What It Takes to Make a BCIA Performance Tested Bull

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I am sure that many of you out there have been reading the articles about the BCIA Central Bull Test Program and are wondering what makes these bulls so special. What exactly does it take for a bull to complete a performance test with BCIA and how do they make the sale? Will these bulls fit into my commercial program? Let's take a look at the requirements and the program and you will see that these bulls have gone through strict criteria just to sell at a BCIA Performance Tested Sale.

The purpose of the BCIA Performance Testing and Sales are to: provide a standard, impartial post-weaning gain test and development program that will furnish records which will be useful to the buyer and consignor in their breeding programs; provide a source of and market for performance tested bulls; provide quality genetics which address the demands of the industry; and to serve as an educational tool for beef cattle improvement and promotion.

The first step in making a BCIA bull is fitting that bull into a group of contemporary bulls from other breeders to which he can be developed with and evaluated against. This starts with the age of the bull. Culpeper Senior bulls are born from August 15 – November 30 of the previous year from the test. Southwest Senior bulls are born from September 15 through December 31 of the previous year. The Southwest Junior bulls are the youngest group with birthdates from January 1 through March 31 of the current test year. Depending on the birthdate, producers have two options of where to test the bulls. The Southwest Junior bulls are on test for 133 days versus 112 days for all the other tests. The Culpeper Senior bulls go on test in June or the beginning of July and finish their test by December.

Before the bulls are eligible to come into the testing program, they have to meet a minimum set of EPD requirements that are based on the Virginia Quality Assured (VQA) Feeder Cattle Program standards for bulls born in the fall of the previous year and spring of the current year. The test station requires a minimum yearling weight (YW) EPD based on the breed, however, if YW EPD's are not available, minimum Weaning Weight (WW) EPD's have to be met.

In addition to the EPD requirements, all bulls must have appropriate individual performance data on file with their respective breed association and performance records that reflect as such. Information required at entry are: actual birth weight, adjusted birth weight and ratio, adjusted 205 day weight and ratio, and minimum frame score of 5.0. All bulls are required to complete a post-weaning backgrounding program of at least 45 days prior to delivery and have to be bunk broke and adapted to feed.

At delivery, the bulls still have to meet certain requirements to come onto the test. All bulls have to be physically sound and exhibit a good disposition upon delivery. At delivery, consignors are required to present: health certificates; complete vaccination records; brucellosis and tuberculosis free test results if coming from a non-TB and Brucellosis free state; negative anaplasmosis test,

and a negative PI BVD test. Bulls are also encouraged to be tested for any genetic defects prior to delivery.

Upon delivery, bulls will be checked for reproductive soundness. In addition, delivery weights will be taken on the bulls and a minimum delivery weight per day of age has to be met. Bulls must exhibit growth of 2.5 pounds per day of age at delivery to be accepted.

Once all these requirements are met, the bulls are accepted for the testing and development period, however, this still does not make them fully eligible for the sale at the conclusion of the test. The bulls will be fed for a period of 112 days (133 for Southwest Junior Bulls) and individual performance records will be kept on all bulls during the test.

At the conclusion of the test, the bulls performance and records will be examined for eligibility into the Performance Tested Sale. Only the top 2/3 within each breed test group will be eligible for the sale. In addition to being one of the top 2/3 performing bull, each bull has to meet the following requirements:

- EPDs – all bulls have to meet the minimum breed YW EPD requirements based on the VQA Feeder Cattle Program standards. In the case in which a YW EPD does not exist, WW EPD will be used to determine eligibility. Official EPDs are requested via performance certificates issued by the breed associations approximately 14 days prior to off-test date.
- Individual Performance – Bulls must meet a minimum test Average Daily Gain (ADG) Ratio of 80; Minimum adjusted 365 day weight ratio of 90 and minimum frame score of 5.0 at off-test to be eligible for sale.
- Health – All bulls selling must have a negative TB, Brucellosis, and Anaplasmosis test within the 30 days prior to the sale. In addition, bulls may be held from the sale for other health reasons (such as excessive ringworm or external warts), upon the recommendation of the veterinarian.
- Genetic Defects – Angus and Angus-influenced bulls of other breeds (i.e. SimmAngus and Gelbvieh Balancers) must be genotyped free of any genetic defects which have been identified (i.e. Arthrogyrosis Multiplex (AM) and Neuropathic Hydrocephaly (NH)) or be determined not at risk of being a carrier of the defect as determined by absence of the carrier ancestors in their pedigree. All bulls deemed carriers of the genetic defects are not eligible for the sale.
- Reproductive Soundness - Every bull must pass a breeding soundness evaluation off-test. The exam will include semen evaluation for Senior bulls, internal palpation, scrotal circumference measure and penile inspection with electro-ejaculator. Junior bull breeding soundness exams will not include semen evaluation. Minimum scrotal measurement will be 32 cm for bulls less than 15 months of age, and 33 cm for bulls 15 to 18 months of age. This is a 2 cm more stringent requirement than the Society for Theriogenology recommendations. Senior bulls will be given a minimum of two opportunities to pass the semen evaluation (off test and again pre-sale). To be classified as a Satisfactory Potential Breeder requires a satisfactory Physical Examination and minimum values for Scrotal Circumference, sperm Motility (>70%) and sperm Morphology (70%).
- Structural Soundness - A three-person committee will evaluate all bulls tested and may remove unsound or unsuitable bulls from the sale group (including feet and leg structure

and soundness issues). The consulting veterinarian, in conjunction with the station management, may also withhold bulls from the sale with structure or other defects.

- Disposition - Bulls with undesirable disposition will not be sold. Test station management & Test & Sale Committees have the authority to eliminate such bulls at any time during the test.
- Registration - All bulls must be registered by a recognized beef breed association. Bulls not eligible for registry will not be allowed to sell. Registration numbers must be provided to the BCIA office no later than the 84-day weigh date for each test. Failure to do so may result in loss of sale eligibility.
- After bulls which fail to meet one or more of these requirements are eliminated from the sale, additional cuts to the sale offering (to achieve the top 2/3 goal) are made utilizing an index which combines individual performance (test ADG and YW) along with EPDs for calving ease, growth, and maternal traits.

Tim Sutphin, BCIA Southwest Bull Test Station manager and bull buyer, likes the rigorous process that the bulls have to go through to make it to the sale. “The bulls are evaluated in an unbiased manner and have to pass breeding soundness exams, structural soundness exams, as well as meeting minimum EPD’s for growth and test average daily gain,” explained Sutphin. “From there, only the top 2/3 of the bulls tested are available for sale.”

Sutphin feels that the BCIA Bull Test sales have always been a source of high quality genetics. As evaluation procedures and technology has advanced, Tim feels that there has become more similarity in the genetics of bulls offered through bull test stations, production sales, private treaty sales, and breed sales. However, the BCIA program remains unique in its ability to not only provide high quality genetics, but diversity in breeds, type and performance- all at one location.

Besides the stringent requirements for the BCIA bull test bulls to meet in order to sell, the BCIA bull consignors also stand behind their bulls. By signing a consignor agreement at the start of the bull test season, the consignor’s agree to certain responsibilities and expectations for both the consignor and BCIA regarding the development and marketing of bulls, breeding guarantee, and other items. The following guarantee is published in the sale catalog:

BULL GAURANTEE: All bulls sold are guaranteed, via written contract between BCIA and the seller, to be breeders. Guarantee will be applicable to bulls which prove to be infertile, have structural soundness problems (including foot soundness), or have other issues which apply under a good-faith guarantee. Any bull that settles a reasonable number of healthy cows shall be considered a breeder. This guarantee is contingent upon the buyer providing proper management prior to, during, and after the breeding season. Proper management shall include appropriate nutrition, breeding management (bull to female ratio appropriate for bull’s age, not commingling yearling bulls with mature bulls in same breeding pastures, proper observation of bulls during breeding season, etc.), and animal health care. If the bull proves to be a non-breeder, the seller shall be entitled to provide the buyer one of the following: a) full refund for the purchase

price, b) replace the bull with another of equal value, or c) issue credit to the buyer redeemable at a future BCIA bull sale.

“You can find a bull to fit any particular scenario, through the BCIA Bull Test Sales,” stated Sutphin. “From low birth weight bulls for heifers to terminal sires, to replacement heifer type bulls, BCIA has something for everyone.”

“I have had good luck with the bulls that I have purchased. They have always held up well and I have never had to go back to an owner for anything,” stated Sutphin. “You have to remember, if you go to a particular breeder’s farm, you have to pick from what he has got. It may not be what will work best for you and your herd, or even a high quality top end bull. You have those options at the BCIA Bull Test Sales, and they are all high quality bulls.”

“The Bull Test Sales provide a good value on high quality, carefully selected bulls. Without the cooperation between consignors, BCIA, myself, and the buyers, the quality of the BCIA Performance Tested Sales would not be able to remain such a viable point in the production chain,” concluded Sutphin.

The Southwest Bull Test Open House is scheduled for Sunday, March 21st from 1:00 until 4:00 PM at Hillwinds Farm. The Southwest Bull Test Sale is set for Saturday, March 27th in Wytheville, beginning at Noon. Please visit the BCIA website for more information on the bulls at www.bcia.apsc.vt.edu.

We hope to see all of you there.