

THE DATA DIVE

by Esther Tarpoff, director of performance programs

Bred females or open females? Where is the value in the data?

Every breeder, no matter the size of their herd, has the opportunity to contribute breeding records.

For many with spring-calving females, you are right in the heat of breeding season. For those with fall-calving females, you likely have already pregnancy checked your herd and made decisions with the females that bred late or were open.

These breeding (and pregnancy detection) records have value at the American Angus Association for your animals in the weekly National Cattle Evaluation (NCE). Heifer breeding records are used in the heifer pregnancy (HP) expected progeny difference (EPD).

Heifer pregnancy evaluation

HP was added to the weekly NCE in 2011. This trait is focused on heifers and utilizes their breeding records. Over the last decade, there have been more than 100,000 heifer breeding records added to the NCE.

In data from the Association, HP has a genetic heritability of 0.15. While HP has a lower heritability — which means it may take longer to see changes in the trait compared with those that are highly heritable — genetic progress will happen over time with selection pressure. With any trait that has a lower heritability, more information is needed to see an increase in accuracy. For HP, this information comes from breeding records on the individual and progeny.

With breeding records, it's important to ensure you submit the entire group of females that are exposed, not only the ones that breed or only the ones that are open. If heifers are culled because they are open, recording that piece of information is critical for a complete group record.

Submitting breeding records, while it seems tedious, can be very simple. The required information includes a breeding season (spring, fall, or single season), the year they were bred, synchronization status, and what bulls they were bred to. This would include first, second, etc. round of AI (artificial insemination) as well as any bull pasture exposure for the females.

While only breeding records for heifers are used in the calculation of HP, you can also submit breeding records on cows. When you submit breeding records to the Association, you can download a calving calendar report that will list when females were bred; who they were bred to; and, if pregnancy check records are provided, the projected calving date for the dam.

Tips for submitting records


There are a few shortcuts available. If submitting through AAA Login and you have multiple females with the same breeding information, you can select all those females at one time,

enter the information, and it will be applied to all the selected females at once.

If females were inseminated to different bulls but all pasture exposed to the same bulls, you can check the box to retain pasture breeding information for the next animal.

If you are entering pregnancy check information at the same time as breeding records, you can dispose of open females on this screen.

If breeding records are provided but no pregnancy check information is entered, those records will not enter the evaluation right away. Heifers not old enough to calve have their records excluded. Once heifers are old enough to have calved and have breeding records reported, if no calf is reported, it is assumed to be an unsuccessful breeding event.

Ensuring complete group information is reported allows selection tools, like HP, to work how they were designed. If you want to make certain you are reporting complete production records, look at participating in the Inventory Reporting program. This program will help you better manage the data for your herd and not leave any females behind. 

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