

News From

# UltraInsights

*“Data You Trust, Service You Deserve!”*

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*The Newsletter that  
Educates,  
Informs,  
and  
Entertains*

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## Inside the Lab



We are in the height of the season. It is Friday afternoon as I write this and I am always amazed at how quiet the phone is on Friday afternoons. Monday mornings are another story entirely!

Less than 5% of the images have come in via a mail or delivery service so far. Less than 15% of the weights are entered by hand here. Keep up the great work!

And, no we don't complain about the mail or data entry, but your help does speed things up!

Let us know if there is something we can do on our end to make things easier for you.

I'd like to thank Matthew Lane for taking time to write our “Out in the Field” section for this issue. Matt has been a strong supporter of ultrasound data collection for many years. I have great respect for the work he does and the insight he has offered over the years and am proud to count him and his wife Jamie as colleagues and friends.

*Becky Hays*

## Out in the Field



My scanning season has been going on for nearly a month and a half now and things out in the country seem to be going well. While the country in general is in a near state of panic, the breeders I work with have a fairly decent outlook.

In our country there have been a few bull sales already and they've been steady to a little stronger compared to last year. We had a large bred stock cow sale and that market was very strong as well. I guess that maybe our industry here is more accustomed to scares and market downturns so the economic downturn doesn't seem to faze most people I have come across.

The concern with curly calf and the potential release of info on more genetic defects in the near future seems to have calmed down. Most breeders have decided what their personal approach is going to be and are moving forward. By the way, most in our area are testing potential carriers and culling any positive carriers. There are a few that have mentioned they are planning on keeping some carrier cows and some are looking to private treaty some carrier bulls as well.

One big concern that a number of my breeders have voiced is the new carcass EPD model the American Angus Association has implemented. There is a great deal of misunderstanding, mistrust and general unease over the new EPD model. A breeder just recently relayed to me how a huge percentage of his cattle went from strongly positive for REA, to nearly every one ending up with negative EPD for REA after the merging of the ultrasound and carcass data.

My concern is this. We have two data sets, one is the trait of economic importance and the other an indicator trait. The ultrasound data set is extremely large (hundreds of thousands of cattle), very complete contemporary groups, unbiased third party collection and evaluation for the most part, heavily structured and overseen by association personnel, and claimed by the former CEO of the AAA as the best data set the association has ever had. Meanwhile, the slaughter data is made up of data collected decades ago, small contemporary groups that are often made up of a subset of a subset of a subset of a contemporary group.

The model originally used for slaughter data rewarded extremely high accuracy values with very small numbers of observations. It used a half-animal model that contains a number of assumptions, many of which are and have been proven to be false or incorrect and finally a data set that is relatively small collected over many years allowing small number of observations to have an unusually large influence on the overall evaluation opening up the possibility of EPD values that are misleading at best or possibly wrong.

to be continued on page 2.

*Matthew Lane*

The Art/Science of Culling

Occasionally, an ultrasound technician will get asked the question, "Why haven't I seen my average %IMF values go up on my cattle even though I've been scanning for several years?"

While many breeders *have* seen improvements in ultrasound traits, other breeders are seeing slower growth.

Keep in mind, actual data could reflect management, while EPDs take into consideration the ancestry's performance as well as individual performance.

The first key to making improvements is to know where a herd is, where that breeder would like it to be, and finally, know what areas to work on, if any.

Most people would be hesitant to use a tool they don't believe in or understand. Their ultrasound technician can assist them in understanding of the technology and working to ensure quality data.

Ultrasound data can be treated like other performance data. If a herd has a large spread of weaning weights, for example, the breeder may decide to work to close that spread and produce more consistent weaning weights.

This can be done several ways, each with different costs and time intervals. One option may be to sell any cow whose offspring have averaged below average, or who ratios less than 100 for weaning weight and then replace those cows with purchased cows who have an above average weaning EPD. This may be fastest, but can also be very costly.

Another option would be to keep the cows and to put emphasis (not single trait selection) on weaning weight when selecting A.I. and natural sires. This method may be less costly, but may require more time to see results.

A middle of the road option may be to cull with consideration. This

process can be easier and more effective if the breeder knows where his herd is, where he wants it to be, and has a game plan on how to get there.

With our weaning weight example, the breeder may choose to cull the bottom 10% ratioing or EPD replacement heifers. If culling pressure is placed on the cows, too, weaning production ratio can be a consideration in which cows to sell.

Along with that, the breeder could place emphasis on weaning EPDs when selecting sires. This does not mean abandoning all other traits of importance. It just means searching for one more trait in the mix of the ideal bull.

With ultrasound, it is unwise to assume that all breeders should be striving for the lowest fat, biggest ribeye, and highest marbling. In fact, each breeder may have a slightly different idea of what is "ideal" based on their herd's performance, their target market, and their long-term goals.

Do not confuse maximize with optimize. As with any goal, it will at some point likely be reached if worked at hard enough. Therefore, when the optimum is reached for the performance trait in hand, it can be lowered on the list of priorities. Weaning weight, in our example, would simply be a trait that you would like to stay above a certain EPD in selecting sires and may become less of a culling criteria.

Many of us identify certain performance with a breeder's name. We know this breeder has high marbling, this breeder might be known for leg and udder soundness, another for high growth.

This distinction comes by knowing where they are, where they want to be, and constantly working to get there. Culling takes on a new importance in this pursuit.

Continued from page 1.

Now of these 2 groups, the model being used is placing a much greater weight to the slaughter data which has more "issues" and the least amount of good verifiable data while minimizing the importance and weight of the ultrasound data. Although the ultrasound data is an indicator trait, the genetic correlations of these traits to almost all slaughter traits is extremely high meaning that, in my estimation, it should certainly be weighted at least even with the slaughter data, if not given more weight.

I can tell you one of the canned answers when asking about this is that "BIF is forcing us to do this". BIF suggests that the economically important trait be used but they don't create the models to do so. It is the association's responsibility to develop and utilize a model that works and is proven. I would appreciate hearing from any of you about your opinions on this topic.

Best of luck. Stay safe and keep the dirty side down as you travel.

Test Your Knowledge:

Answers on Pages 4.

- 1.) Rump images are not required for Limousin, Gelbvieh, and Simmental. (T or F)
- 2) Weaning weights are required for ultrasound to be processed with the Simmental Association. (T or F)
- 3) Scan ID can be tag or tattoo. (T or F).
- 4) A sick or injured animal should be left in the main contemporary group. (T or F)
- 5) Weights collected on two consecutive days and averaged are more accurate than weighing once over a day-long period. (T or F)

## Making Good Better

Everyone knows that the most important part of ultrasounding is the ultrasound machine and the computer to save all the images. What people forget is the clippers. Clippers are needed to take the hair off the animal so the field technician can get a better image.

Clippers are a simple thing to run and use. There are a few things to remember when using them to make them work better for you and to make the blades last longer. Dirt is the number one thing that dulls the blades. Blowers are a great thing to use to get the dirt out of the hair. The one problem I have seen with this is not spending enough time blowing. Cattle will not die from a blower. No way. Impossible. Another problem with the dirt is that some people clip the cattle, and then blow them. They think it is easier to get dirt out of short hair than long hair. This is correct, but if you want your blades to last longer, blow first.

The number two thing is to lubricate your blades every couple of head. You can use several different oils. I personally like Final Bloom from your local show cattle supplier. Some other good oils are sewing machine oil, or just a real light oil used for something else. The number one no-no in blade lubrication is WD-40. WD-40 has grit in it. That is what I use to sharpen the blades. This will dull your blades as fast as dirt.

When rolling your clippers up to put away, BE GENTLE. Missing teeth on combs don't cut hair. The cord is what supplies the electricity to the motor to make them run. Don't roll the cord tightly on the motor as it will pull the cord out of the motor. It will also look like a slinky the next time you use it. This will cause you to trip on the cord and break teeth off. Broken teeth won't cut hair.

These are just a few things I have learned over the years to help with clippers. And who knows? If you do these things, you, too, might get 700-1000 head out of your blades as I have with Craig.

*Erik James*

## A Look Back .....Top 10

This time of year can be especially trying for ultrasound technicians and their families. Their (your) career requires many nights on the road, countless hours on the cell phones, and numerous meals from drive-thrus. Missed ballgames, teacher conferences, birthdays and more can take a toll by the end of the spring rush. Sheer commitment to customer service and drive to do a job well-done keeps many technicians moving even through vehicle breakdowns, illnesses, burned offices, severe cold and more.

By request, we've attempted a bit of humor and come up with another "Top 10" that many of you might relate to. (Craig supplied #3 which was a bit painful, but apparently I'm very predictable!) You may have your own thoughts to add to this, but here's a start. Keep up the good work and know that you are appreciated!

*You know you've been on the road too long when:*

10. You have more shirts hanging in the back of the pickup than in your closet.
9. Your toothbrush and shaving supplies stay in your overnight case, even when you are home.
8. Your kids want to go to Daddy's "house" to swim (a motel).
7. You start referring to going to the motel at night as "going home."
6. Your underwear drawer isn't opened during scanning season. (relax, they're in the bag)
5. The only calls you get at home are from a telemarketer; everyone else knows to use your cell phone.
4. Hearing Barbara, the GPS, saying "arriving at your destination" (home) brings tears to your eyes.
3. Your spouse goes through his/her annual "You spend too much time away from the family" tantrum.
2. Your pickup plays the role of office, refrigerator, closet, repair shop, dining room, recliner, and bed.
1. Your dog barks when you come home because it thinks you are a stranger.

### It Worked for Me

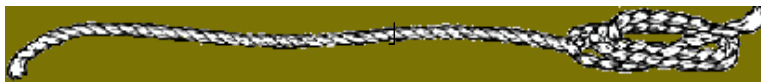
For about \$2 for the end cap, some scrap materials, and 15 minutes of time, Craig Hays was able to construct this container for holding clippers. A cap (white) was glued to about a one foot length of 6" PVC pipe (blue-green). Then, two hose clamps attach a 1/2" metal rod (formed to fit the table) to the container. A hole was drilled into the table for hanging the container. A bungee strap holds the clipper container to the table when in use and allows it to be removed for storage.

The clippers are placed, head down, into the container when not in use. Craig will often put paper towels or a cloth in the bottom for extra protection.

Craig reports that he came up with this idea after seeing a similar design while scanning with Dr. John Brethour. It has been useful in freeing up space on the scanning table and promotes longevity of the clippers. When the clippers were on the table, they could sometimes slide off and break a tooth and the cords were more exposed to get cut in two.



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### Answers to the Quiz

- 1.) T 2.) T, and most other associations 3.) F, tattoo should be used except when an Excel file is used for cross referencing (for bull tests) 4.) F 5.) T, but scan weights are recommended to be empty weights.