



Matt Woolfolk | director of performance programs

The Art of the Deal: Bull Sale Season

In the cattle business, this time of year is known as bull sale season; aka my favorite season on the cattle calendar. It is opportunity for seedstock producers to show off their genetics in hopes that their commercial customer base is impressed enough to, as the old adage goes, vote with their pocket books. It's a chance to look across a breed and see what bloodlines are working to make quality commercial bulls. There will be many sleepless nights across the country, as bull sellers prepare and pray that there will be enough buyers (and enough dollars) to make their operation successful.

Studying bull sale catalogs is probably the closest thing I have to a hobby. Marketing commercial bulls is part science, part art, and part business. I find it interesting to watch the direction of individual producers and the entire industry. Even with allegiances to specific breeds, I have learned a lot from keeping an eye on what other breeds are doing. As purebred seedstock marketers, other breeds are certainly our competition, but also a big part of our success. After all, it's hard to utilize crossbreeding without multiple breeds! I don't intend to predict how 2018 sales will go in the Shorthorn breed or across the industry, but I've picked up some interesting tidbits as we

head into the heart of the season.

There were articles published around the turn of the New Year trying to forecast the strength of the 2018 bull sale season. With an improved feeder calf market, there appears to be some optimism among sellers that their bulls will fetch a fair price. As always, there are some doubters, citing a flooded market and less demand for bulls nationwide. Personally, I'm cautiously optimistic that things will hold steady and maybe improve from last year. An interesting point brought up by many producers is that not all customers are created equally. Sitting ringside, you might have some customers who sell all their calves at weaning, others who breed their own replacements, and others that retain ownership through the feedlot. All these cattlemen are looking for bulls that fit their needs at the same sale. It can be a difficult balancing act to maintain the identity of your program while providing seedstock that fit multiple marketing strategies, but it certainly can be done. Sticking to the foundation of a breeding program while making select matings to improve and fit the many needs customers is how successful producers satisfy a diverse clientele. One trend echoed by many seedstock operations is

the growing emphasis on performance data in bull selection, especially by the younger generation. Our entire world is becoming more information and technology driven, and finding the right bulls for success in the commercial cattle industry is no exception.

No matter your operation size or breed affiliation, there are a few constants to being successful in the bull marketing business. First and foremost is integrity and customer service. Bull customers not only look for the operations that will sell them problem-free bulls, but also ones that properly handle the situation when a problem does arise. Building a reputation of being helpful to your buyers will go a long way in building (and keeping) a loyal customer base. While this may seem obvious, having high-quality bulls plays a big role in successfully selling bulls. Identifying the needs of your customer base and producing bulls that fit those needs well will always spur a strong bull market.

Whether you have 1, 10, or 100 bulls to market this year, I wish you the best of luck. Always keep your knife sharp, your customers satisfied, and your eye out for the next great idea to improve your marketing strategy. 

2018 National Junior Shorthorn Show & Youth Conference Hotel Information - June 26-July 1 • Madison, Wisconsin:

**Sheraton Madison Hotel (Headquarters)
706 John Nolen Dr.
Madison, WI 53713**

For reservations call the hotel at (608) 251-2300 and ask for the American Shorthorn Association block.

**Clarion Suites at The Alliant Energy Center
2110 Rimrock Rd
Madison, WI 53713**

For reservations call the hotel at (608) 284-1234 and ask for the American Shorthorn Association block.