

Georgia Bull Evaluation: a review of the Tifton program

Francine Henry, Ph.D.

UGA Beef Extension Specialist

Department of Animal and Dairy Sciences - Tifton Campus

As we successfully closed the 2021-2022 Georgia Bull Evaluation season with the Tifton Bull Sale on March 2nd, it occurred to me that it would be a great time to give a summary on the metrics of the program to promote the great work that is being done in the state of Georgia for over 60 years. If you had the chance to read Mr. Steve's and Ms. Patsie's article in the February issue of the GCA magazine featuring the Tifton Bull Test, I am sure you would agree that they did a great job enlightening us with some of the history of the program since its conception in 1958, when it was named the Tifton Beef Bull Gain Evaluation Test. Since then, a lot has changed, including the addition of a dedicated facility (the Tifton Bull Evaluation Center, located near Irwinville, GA) in 1995, the introduction of the Calhoun Bull Evaluation in 1971 to accommodate more breeders and facilitate travel to those located in the northern region of the state, the partnership with the Georgia Cattlemen's Association, and the focus of the program towards a more educational service to the GA beef producers and seedstock operations. By testing bulls in a uniform environment and reporting their metrics, the commercial producers learn the value of record keeping and are offered high quality bulls to incorporate in their operations, and the breeders receive value added tools for selecting and marketing their product.

When the test started 64 years ago in Tifton, bulls were performance tested based exclusively on average daily gain and weight per day of age after being fed a uniform diet for 140 days and those were the parameters for both Tifton and Calhoun tests. We did not have EPDs back then! According to Jackie Kennedy in "The History of Georgia's Cattle Industry" book just released, for the first test in Tifton, 83 bulls were consigned by 23 breeders and those included 37 Polled-Hereford, 15 Santa Gertrudis, 11 Hereford, 10 Angus, 3 Charbray, 3 Red Angus, 2 Charolais, and 2 Polled Shorthorn. Out of those, 77 bulls were sold and the highest price paid was \$1,425 for a Victor Domino Polled Hereford from Airview Hereford Farm in LaGrange while the average sale price was \$672.

In the beginning, bulls with a broad range of birth dates were accepted and the test was conducted for 140 days; however, as test regulations were narrowed down to more uniform requirements and Beef Improvement Federation guidelines became stricter, the birth dates range also became narrower and the feeding period was reduced to 112 days. The Georgia Bull Evaluation program has kept parameters that worked well over the years, but at the same time, has incorporated vital and much needed changes to keep the program relevant and up to date as the beef industry evolves. In this last



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season, only bulls born between September 1 and November 30 of 2020, and December 1 of 2020 and February 28 of 2021, were accepted at the Calhoun and Tifton test, respectively. The sale order is still based on performance indexes (combination of average daily gain and weight per day of age values) but with the incorporation of EPDs since 1990, producers now have better selection tools in their toolboxes, such as carcass ultrasound information and dollar indexes. Additionally, for the past three years, with the addition of Genomic Enhanced EPDs as a requirement, buyers are now capable of making incremental changes in their herds based on specific traits that are relevant for their production goals and the improvement of their operations.

For the first time since its conception, it was in this last season that the Bull Test Committee decided to adhere to an 84-day feeding test. That allowed feed costs to be reduced while bulls were still able to show their maximum performance and gain well. Also, if there is one thing we all learned these past couple of years, is that technology is a wonderful thing and that allowed us to include live auction for online bidders and the ability to preview bulls through videos that are available online before the sale. In the last Tifton sale, we had a total of 121 registered buyers (101 in person and 20 online), an online audience of 50 viewers, and 77 bids from 9 active online bidders on 23 bulls. A total of 5 bulls (two SimAngus, one Simmental, and two Angus) were sold online with three of them to the same buyer. These numbers are really amazing as they

show us that having an online bidding process not only broadens the audience scope of the auction, allowing remote promotion of the program and purchases, but it is also beneficial to the breeder since every active bid beyond those made in person adds to the value of that bull being sold.

Now let's talk about revenue. The 64th Tifton sale on March 2nd generated a gross value of \$266,100 with an overall average price per bull of \$3,596 (74 bulls sold). Averages by breed were \$3,865 on 40 Angus, \$3,100 on 25 SimAngus, \$3,325 on 4 Simmental, and \$4,140 on 5 Hereford bulls. This year's average was the second highest since the first edition of the Tifton sale in 1959, only behind the 2014-2015 Sale, which averaged \$4,290 per bull (105 bulls sold). Since 1958, 9,345 bulls have been tested and 5,947 bulls have been sold, generating over \$11 million.

We are already looking forward to the next season of the GA Bull Evaluation program. Our goal is to always improve the test and the quality of data available to both consignors and buyers. This is evident by the inclusion of Genomic Enhanced EPDs for all bulls that are sold. In the future, I foresee the need to provide producers with intake and feed efficiency data. By constantly improving, this is how we keep our program as one of the top tests in the nation! To end, I would like to thank all consignors and buyers for their support over the years. This was my first test and sale and I am looking forward to many more to come!



A



B



C



D

High Indexing Breed Awards. A: Angus and High Overall Indexing from Hill Angus Farm - Dr. Gary Hill - Lot 97, 6.37 ADG, 4.18 WDA; B: SimAngus from Freeman Cattle Company - Mr. Sam Freeman - Lot 39, 5.48 ADG, 3.87 WDA; C: Simmental from Muddy Pond Simmental Farms - Mr. Johnny and Mrs. Marianne Owen - Lot 127, 5.21 ADG, 3.64 WDA; D: Hereford from Stonegate Farm - Mr. Bob Neligan - Lot 117, 4.76 ADG, 3.40 WDA.