

Taking Performance Testing to the Next Level

Midland Bull Test is synonymous with high-quality genetic profiles that help ranchers become more profitable. Known as the “Granddaddy of Performance Testing,” the Columbus, Montana, bull test is America’s largest source of performance-tested bulls, marketing between 2,000 and 2,500 annually. The owners of Midland Bull Test, Leo and Sam McDonnell, Jr., also operate an elite herd of registered Angus cattle. Leo and Sam’s son, Steve Williams, and his wife, Lindsay, manage Midland Bull Test.

Accurately Portraying Genetic Potential

Each spring Midland Bull Test hosts a three-day sale where 900 bulls sell to breeders and ranchers from Canada to Brazil. What buyers may not realize is the 900 bulls are selected from a pool of 10,000, which demonstrates Midland Bull Test’s dedication to providing only the best performance genetics.

“We truly are performance breeders and select animals based on traits of economic importance,” explains McDonnell. “We know just how important it is that the information we provide on a bull accurately portrays how the animal will perform in our buyers’ herds.” The bull development facility is home to one of the largest feed efficiency systems in the United States, where a bull’s ability to convert feed to gain can be tracked.

Future of the Industry

Because of their continued dedication to precisely knowing a bull’s true genetic potential, Midland Bull Test has implemented HD 50K in

Angus bulls to gather the most information possible.

With the release of the High Density 50K technology, McDonnell knows breeders and buyers will continue to become more excited about genomic technology and be more confident in new selection opportunities. HD 50K provides the first and only DNA results from the High-Density panel, where more than 50,000 markers are genotyped for each animal.

“I still believe that an animal’s actual performance and Expected Progeny Differences (EPDs) are important numbers to consider in selection decisions,” says McDonnell. “But new technology, like HD 50K, provides information on traits we don’t measure, along with enhancing the selection on traits we do measure. Also, HD 50K will be beneficial in selecting our herd sires, deciding which cows to flush and identifying outstanding yearling bulls before higher-accuracy EPDs are available. People should start using and learning about this technology, as it is an important step in the future of our industry.”

Started with MVPs

Beginning in 2009, Midland Bull Test added GeneSTAR® Molecular Value Predictions (MVP™s) to their sale catalog and selection information to more accurately portray and market bulls. The 56-marker panel results provided buyers additional information on feed efficiency, tenderness and marbling, three economically relevant traits that



Sam and Leo McDonnell
Midland Bull Test

directly impact profit potential. At their December 2009 bull sale, McDonnell said, buyers showed increased interest in MVP test results and the high-selling bull brought \$9,000 based on his MVPs for tenderness.

“We started implementing MVP results as another tool to improve the reliability of our selection decisions,” explains McDonnell. “As the number of markers and traits expands, we hope to rely on genomic information more and more.”

Dedicated to the DNA Profile

Leo McDonnell notes that as genomic technology has evolved in such a short timeframe, he has relied on the Pfizer Animal Genetics team to explain the information and educate his buyers on how the test results can best be utilized in their own operations.

“We really enjoy working with the team at Pfizer Animal Genetics, and they have helped make things happen for us,” shares McDonnell. “They are truly dedicated to developing DNA profiles that can help breeders and buyers be more profitable.”