



Composites

SIMPLIFY REPRODUCTIVE MANAGEMENT

COMPOSITE BREEDS LIKE LIM-FLEX PROVIDE HYBRID VIGOR IN A STRAIGHTBRED SYSTEM



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Shane Whiting, Commercial Cow/Calf Producer



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What's the big deal with composite bulls? And why should I use them?

Two good questions, says Dr. Bob Weaber, a geneticist and head of Kansas State University's Eastern Kansas Research and Extension Centers. For answers, he says look at the cowherd.

That's where composite bulls help commercial cow-calf producers realize the benefits of heterosis without the headaches of a traditional crossbreeding program. "They (the bulls) come with the crossbreeding system already built in," he says, using Lim-Flex as an example. Lim-Flex composites can have 25%-75% Limousin genetics with the remainder being Registered Angus or Registered Red Angus.

"We get our biggest boost in performance due to heterosis in lowly heritable traits like cow longevity and fertility," he says. Given today's cost in developing replacement heifers, cow longevity is more important now than ever before.

Composite bulls also provide breed complementarity—that's when the breed combination possess complementary traits like Limousin and Angus do.

Coupled with heterosis, it adds even more to a commercial herd's economic potential. "So, producers can expect a 13 to 15 percent improvement in weaning weight per cow exposed using a Lim-Flex breeding program, for example," he says.

REAL WORLD *Results*

Shane Whiting and his two sons run around 1,000 commercial cows in northeast Utah near Roosevelt—all Lim-Flex, bulls and cows alike.

"Docility and calving ease are the two number-one things for a commercial rancher," he says. "And the docility of the Lim-Flex is really great. But calving ease is top of the line. She has to be able to produce a calf without a lot of problems."

They have a 60-day breeding and calving season. "And our conception rate with Lim-Flex cattle has run 95-96 percent consecutively for up to 20 years now."

He also appreciates that his cows have a moderate frame size, yet milk well. "We have better longevity, and we have a better bag," he says. "These hold up."

Whiting has carcass data on thousands of head beginning in 2014. That year, his Lim-Flex calves came down the rail grading 94 percent Choice and Prime. "Now we're at 97 percent."

Data from the Meat Animal Research Center, Clay Center, Nebraska, helps explain why Whiting's Lim-Flex cows perform well on a diet largely of grass and grass hay. "There was no statistical difference in feed efficiency yet lower intake. That's likely tied to the expected lower mature weights on these females," Weaber says. Citing other research, Weaber points out that Limousin females had the lowest mature cow weight among 10 breeds, with weights corrected for breed effect and contrasted to Angus.

Hitting Home Runs **IN THE SOUTHEAST**

Will Hargett owns a sale barn in Ayden, North Carolina, in the eastern part of the state. "We handle quite a few cattle that are in less than load lots," he says, with cow herds ranging from 20 to around 100 head.

A number of years ago, he marketed some Lim-Flex calves to a producer who back-grounded and finished them. "About a year later, he called me back and said, 'We've been in the business for three generations and that last set of calves we bought out of your barn really showed us something.'"

Hargett did a little research and decided he would help place Lim-Flex bulls with area cow-calf producers. "We've had a great experience with Lim-Flex bulls in recent years with what I would consider to be fairly average commercial cows, and just get outstanding calves coming off these cows," he says. "And we've had a lot of good response from the people buying these calves."

Several of his customers retain their heifers. To that end, he says the Lim-Flex genetics are busting some age-old myths. Bred back to Lim-Flex bulls, "They're not throwing anything with bad temperament issues. They're easy to handle, they're good milkers, they're good mothers and are producing fantastic calves."

DROUGHT *Insurance*

"We've been tested pretty hard as far as weather the last handful of years," says Shane Anderson. "Mostly drought and feeding a lot of poor-quality roughages. And they (his Lim-Flex cows) seem to be holding up."

Anderson, a cow-calf producer from Towner, North Dakota, says that over the years he's used Lim-Flex genetics, he sees more consistency in the conformation and disposition of the cattle. "I've had a lot of confidence in the Lim-Flex females as far as calving ease and the vigor of the calves when they get up and get going. They're really a herd that doesn't require a lot of attention in the spring. And that's a big seller for me."

He'll come back with Lim-Flex bulls on his replacement heifers. "I'm happy with the selection I'm finding in the Lim-Flex breed as far as bulls that hit my maternal needs as well as ones that hit the benchmark as far as the feeder calves and the performance I expect from them."

What's more, he's impressed with the longevity of Lim-Flex females. Because of drought, he has culled deep, but says there are still some females in his herd that are producing at 12-13 years old.

When it's time to cull the old cows, their condition and yield adds value at the sale barn, he says. "I still want some salvage value and you know what? Even at 12, 13 years of age, they sell just as they would if they were five, six, seven years old. They look good."

