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Potential Bull Buyers Perceive Increased Value to their Operations When Purchasing Bulls from the Florida Bull Test[1]

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Florida Bull Test

The Florida Bull Test serves as an educational aid for the improvement of beef cattle in the Southeast United States. The test aims to provide commercial cow/calf producers with a source of bulls that have been gain tested, thoroughly evaluated at the same location, and have passed stringent health requirements. The test provides an opportunity for seedstock producers to advertise their breeding programs through testing and marketing bulls and promotes awareness and understanding of the latest animal breeding concepts and tools while showcasing beef cattle genetics in Florida. Since 2000, fourteen annual bull tests have been completed, with 1,205 bulls tested from more than fourteen different breeds.

The test consists of a 112-day performance test and a breeding-soundness evaluation of each bull that qualifies for the auction. In 2010 changes were made to the test to obtain feed efficiency data; residual feed intake (RFI) is the measure of feed efficiency used to rank the bulls in the test. Now, upon arrival bulls are placed in pens at the UF/IFAS North Florida Research and Education Center (NFREC) Feed Efficiency Facility for the first 56 days of the test where they receive free-choice access to a diet that includes a high proportion of roughage, targeting an average daily gain (ADG) of 3.5 pounds. At the conclusion of the feed efficiency portion, bulls are moved to pasture and continue receiving free-choice access to the same diet for the remainder of the test. Throughout the test, bulls are observed and screened for structural soundness and disposition. Bulls deemed structurally unsound or those having poor disposition do not qualify for the sale. Overall ranking for the test is based on ADG and the weight per day of age (WDA), generating an index ratio. Additional information, such as actual performance data, expected progeny differences (EPDs), and carcass ultrasound data is also available for bull buyers to aid in their selection of quality bulls to purchase. Throughout the years, mean sale average has ranged from $1,283 (in 2001) to $3,274 (in 2013).

The 14th Florida Bull Test Sale was held on January 18, 2014 at the UF/IFAS North Florida Research and Education Center in Marianna, FL. Of the 126 bulls originally consigned to the test, 79 bulls were on offer. Bulls were excluded from the sale if a consignor did not want to sell the bull at the Florida Bull Test Sale or if bulls failed to meet

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the minimum performance index, failed the breeding-soundness exam, had structural-soundness concerns, or had poor disposition. The sale grossed $239,050, with an average of $3,058 per lot. Prior to the initiation of the sale a survey was conducted among potential buyers.

Florida Bull Test Potential Buyer Survey

The goal of the survey was to identify the characteristics of bull buyers and the perception of the value of purchasing a bull from the Florida Bull Test to their operation. A total of 77 potential buyers completed the survey. The majority of buyers had operations located in Florida (61 percent), followed by Alabama (27 percent) and Georgia (12 percent) (Figure 1). Fifty-four percent of buyers had purchased bulls from the Florida Bull Test in the past, and 68 percent of those buyers had purchased at least two bulls (Figure 2).

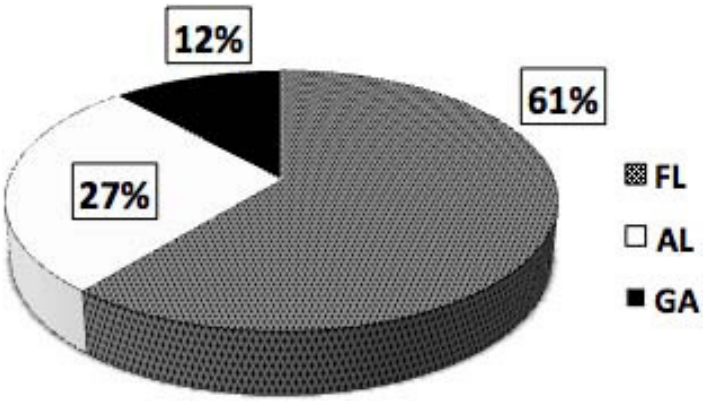

Figure 1. Florida Bull Test potential bull buyers' state of origin.

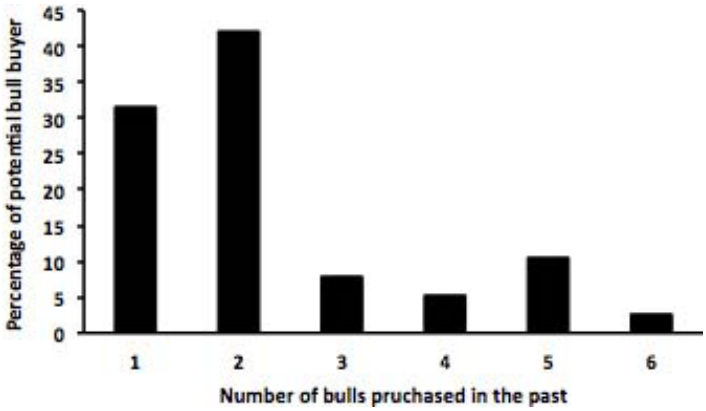

Figure 2. Number of bulls purchased in the past by Florida Bull Test potential bull buyers.

The buyers were asked to rank the traits they use when purchasing a bull from the Florida Bull Test, with 1 being the most important and 6 the least important (Table 1). Breed was ranked as the most important trait when purchasing a bull, followed by performance and rank in the test, sale price, phenotype, feed efficiency, and pedigree. When asked what improvements were expected to their operations when purchasing bulls from the Florida Bull Test, 29 percent of potential buyers expected increased calf performance, 23 percent improved feed efficiency, 22 percent improved genetics of the cow herd, 13 percent decreased health and fertility risks, and 12 percent increased cost benefit, while only 1 percent of potential buyers expected no improvements to their operations when purchasing a bull from the Florida Bull Test (Figure 3). In addition, 75 percent of potential buyers stated a perceived increased value of $50 or more per calf sired by bulls purchased at the Florida Bull Test with 8 percent of those stating a perceived increase of $125 or more in value per calf sired (Figure 4).

Table 1. Bull traits ranked by Florida Bull Test potential bull buyers when considering purchasing a bull, with 1 being the most important and 6 the least important.

Bull trait	Rank
Breed	1
Performance and rank in test	2
Sale price	3
Phenotype	4
Feed efficiency	5
Pedigree	6

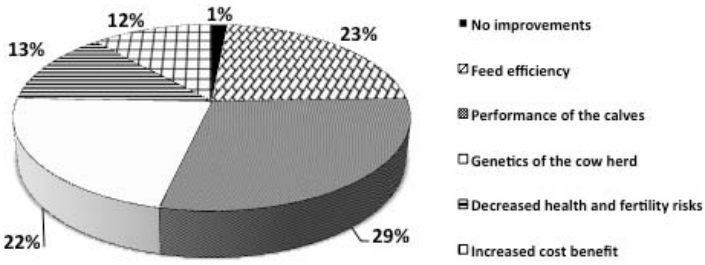

Figure 3. Expected improvement to operation by potential bull buyers when purchasing a bull from the Florida Bull Test.

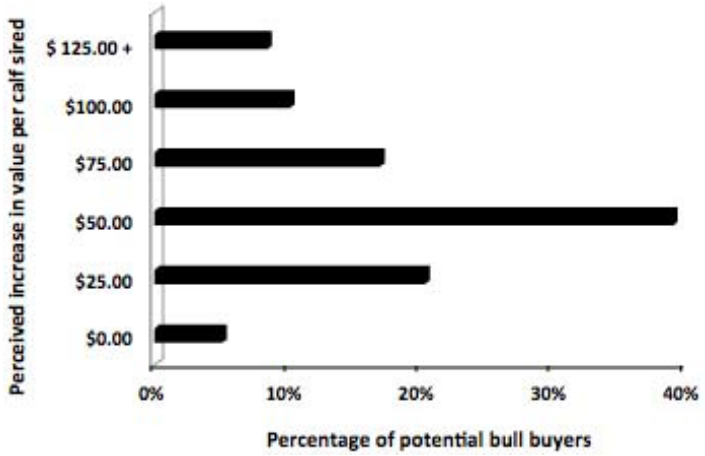

Figure 4. Potential bull buyers perceived increase in value per calf sired by bull purchased from the Florida Bull Test.

The survey succeeded in identifying which characteristics of bulls are most important to buyers purchasing bulls.

The perception of bull buyers is that purchasing bulls from the Florida Bull Test increases the value of calves sired by improving performance, genetics, and feed efficiency of their herds. Since the beginning, the Florida Bull Test has been under constant evolution to achieve its goal of helping producers select high-quality sires, thereby improving production and profitability of beef cattle producers in Florida and the Southeast United States.