

A Commitment to Our *Angus Comrades*

BY JERRY MORROW

In Mexico the word is comrade. In the United States it's partner. On both sides of the border the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is making it possible for beef producers who talk in either language to understand the business benefits that partnerships can bring.

This was the message a panel of experts in cattle and beef trade from the United States and Mexico brought to the Texas Cattle Feeders Association convention last fall in San Antonio.

It's also a message being relayed between the American and Mexican Angus Associations. Both groups are interested in opening new marketing channels, sharing information, and promoting quality Angus genetics.

The following report is from Jerry Morrow, Latin America marketing specialist for the American Angus Association. Morrow helped facilitate the first Angus seminar and ranch tour ever held in Mexico this past March. He came away from that event feeling more confident than ever that the Mexican and American Angus Associations can work together and that breeders on both sides of the border will share in the benefits.



Oregon Angus breeder Dave Peterson (center) joined Alfanso Rincon and his son, Poncho, on the 1995 Mexican Angus Association ranch tour.

Comrades

Some people evaluate their progress through financial gain, while others feel their greatest satisfaction comes from assisting in the education of other people. A great example of the latter took place in Nuevo Casas Grandes, Mexico, during the first week of March.

The first Angus seminar ever held in Mexico happened there. It was hosted by Tarahumara Angus, a ranch owned by Joaquin Lopez and managed by Carlos Prado. The seminar was a joint effort by the Mexican and American Angus Associations and Tarahumara.

The Mexican Angus Association usually conducts its annual meeting at a livestock exposition somewhere in Mexico and features the show ring. This past year the decision was made to center the program around performance and expected progeny differences (EPDs). It proved to be an excellent decision which should have a lasting influence on the cattle business in Mexico.

In order to substantiate this statement, let me quickly explain the present conditions existing within the Mexican cattle industry. First and foremost, most of Mexico has experienced severe drought. Ranchers there depend on forage for year-round grazing of cattle. Few have supplemental feed, which necessitates plenty of cured native grasses for the winter. During the winter of 1994-95 there was none. As a consequence, thousands of cattle have been moved across the U.S. border and sold, or have died from starvation.

Some of the larger ranchers have irrigated ryegrass and sorghum fields, but even then, it's expensive to winter a large cow herd on the irrigated pastures that are intended for either backgrounding steers or

growing replacement heifers.

To make matters worse, a number of cattle producers discovered their cows would not breed back under these drought conditions due to lack of nutrition. Basically, the Mexican cattle numbers have been substantially reduced, especially the kind of cattle which have dominated the herds in recent years — those too big and inefficient.

Mexican and other Latin America cattlemen have long depended on the show ring for leadership in breeding selection. This leadership emanated from the United States, so the cattle selected became bigger and bigger. Most of the Angus cattle in Mexico are of two extremes — too tall and inefficient, or too short and incapable of producing quality commercial bulls.

The Angus cow herds are of predominantly Canadian breeding, with most of the herd bulls originating in the United States. The Canadian breeders and government have done a great job of marketing and promotion in Mexico. The Canadian government has subsidized much of this promotion, even furnishing plane fare and transportation for Mexican breeders to visit Canada and select breeding cattle. They also pay all shipping costs to the Mexican border.

Many of the Angus bulls being used in Mexico are too "framey" for the Mexican environment, which is extremely rocky and abundant with vegetation featuring muchas espinas (many long needles). I've seen many bulls in the desert areas which were only trying to exist; they weren't concerned with breeding cows.

Mexican cattle breeders need medium-framed bulls which are easy fleshing with adequate muscling and sound feet and legs. They also need



A Mexican vaquero and his stock dog take a break from herding Angus cattle at the El Rancho La Presa.



Tour participants view Angus cattle and visit at the Wallace-Jeffers Ranch near Casas Grandes.

performance information on their cattle. Canadian Angus, for the most part, don't have in-herd or EPD comparisons for breeders to use in sire selection or mating decisions.

The Mexican Angus Association is now located at Gomez-Palacio in the State of Durango. The Association has done a great job with their pedigree responsibilities and the Mexican breeders are very conscientious with animal identification. Still, the Association has never had the staff or finances available to

collect performance information. Furthermore, the breeders haven't had the know-how or the assistance to accomplish the necessities of a comprehensive performance program.

A Step in the Right Direction

Now, let me take you back to the Tarahumara ranch, where plenty of Angus performance information was absorbed by the seminar's attentive audience of 85 Mexican cattle producers. These cattlemen represented

both registered and commercial sectors, as well as all breeds.

Sharing their knowledge at this seminar were representatives from the American Angus Association, including John Crouch, director of performance programs; Mick Colvin, executive director of the Certified Angus Beef Program; and Dave Peterson, manager of Lark Angus, Powell Butte, Ore. Also featured on the educational program was Roy Wallace of Select Sires, Plain City, Ohio.

The program encompassed the understanding and utilization of performance information, especially EPDs. Breed improvement discussion included sire selection, artificial insemination (AI) and estrus synchronization. Participants also learned how the Certified Angus Beef Program works and all the opportunities this branded beef program presents to producers. An hour-long question and answer period wrapped up the seminar.

The day following the seminar, participants were given a ranch tour at the Wallace-Jeffers Ranch east of Casas Grandes. It's a beautiful ranch, but was also experiencing severe drought at the time of our visit. Regardless, the visitors took it all in, and continued to discuss seminar topics and quiz the speakers. Dave Peterson and Roy Wallace stayed on with the tour and further shared their thoughts on topics such as feeding mineral supplements and phenotypic selection.

The Mexican Angus Association held its annual meeting and election of officers the following day. It was a congenial and productive meeting in which some crucial decisions were made for the future benefit of



Newly elected leaders of the Mexican Angus Association are standing (l to r): Ernesto Davila, Leon, director, Jose Breede, Gomez-Palacio, director, Carlos Prado, Casas Grandes, secretary, Enrique Candiani, Logos de Moreno, past president & director, Joaquin Lopez, Casas Grandes, president, Jaime Jeffers, Casas Grandes, director; Jorge Chavez, Leon, treasurer; Carlos Fierro, Chihuahua, director. Directors sitting (l to r) are Luis Garcia, Gustavo Breede, Gomez-Palacio; Jose Trevino, Chihuahua; and Alfonso "Poncho" Rincon, Ojuelas.

the Angus breed in Mexico.

Joaquin Lopez was elected president, along with a sound group of breeders, registered and commercial, as officers and directors. It's a group dedicated to the Angus breed and production of the right kind. Some breeders are already starting to register their cow herds with the American Angus Association in order to initiate performance information and eventually EPDs.

One of Mexican Angus Association's main goals in 1995 is to become involved in an Angus bull test at "The Campana," which is a government testing facility north of Chihuahua. The Mexican Angus Association is also serious about employing someone to assist in membership and future educational seminars.

John Crouch, Mick Colvin, Dave Peterson and Roy Wallace had an opportunity before the seminar to visit with leaders of the Chihuahua cattle industry. A group of 25 veteran purebred and commercial cattle producers,

and university and government leaders were treated to a *Certified Angus Beef*[™] dinner at Los Parados Restaurant in Chihuahua.

The food was superb, but the highlight of the evening was the conversation before and after dinner. We found we shared many common interests and concerns, including grading standards, beef processing plant improvement, and market prices for cattle. Overall, it was an impressive meeting.

At the present time, Angus ranks ninth among cow herd breeds in Mexico. We need to do something about that. The whole country, especially the cattle industry, is suffering in many ways. There isn't a quick solution to their financial or drought problems. Still, the American Angus Association is assisting in a big way with a realistic, educational program. It's designed to increase the Angus influence south of the border. Allow me to give an example.

While visiting with a Angus friend in Chihuahua, I was informed that the

Cattlemen's Union of Chihuahua was assisting the local cattlemen with an AI program in an attempt to improve beef cattle quality in that state. He mentioned that it wasn't going to help the Angus breed, since there wasn't any Angus semen there to utilize.

After thinking a minute, I asked him if he would breed 50 of his Brangus commercial cows to Angus bulls if the semen was available. He said he would. On April 16, after we contacted a number of U.S. Angus breeders and bull studs, a shipment of 400 units of quality Angus semen was sent to the Chihuahua Cattlemen's Union. The following week, another large shipment of Angus semen was sent to the Mexican Angus Association to initiate a breed improvement program among their members.

Why go to all this trouble and expense? Because we believe the best way to initiate the flow of water is to prime the pump,

