

Unlocking The Data Stronghold

Identify the Profit Makers, Robbers

Through the innovative Angus BRS program, commercial producers using Angus genetics can tap the power of performance-information management.

BY ERIC GRANT

Nebraska's Bryan Rentschler represents the highest hopes for the beef industry's younger generation. As a boy, he dreamed of someday running his own cows and operating his own ranch. At the age of 20, he already had made good on that goal, having purchased a good piece of ground near the town of

Atkinson. Now that he's 25, he's finally got his herd of topflight commercial Angus cows in place.

The last thing he wants to do is squander the opportunities he's worked so hard to create.

Needless to say, Rentschler is a sharp, progressive manager. He realizes he must continuously improve the quality, consistency

and efficiency of his cattle to survive. Without accurate and complete information, he cannot manage his operation the way it needs to be.

That's why he enrolled his cow herd in the Angus Beef Record Service (BRS) earlier this year. Angus BRS is an innovative new program created by the American Angus Association to

equip commercial producers with performance-information analysis similar to that which seedstock producers have enjoyed for years through Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR).

To participate, commercial producers simply submit information about their cow herds, including breed composition, sire information, breeding information, calving and weaning data, and any additional performance or carcass data collected on a calf.

This "raw" information is then analyzed and interpreted by the Association and returned to the participating producers in the form of "interactive" (summarize the data previously submitted and serve as data submission forms for the next production measure) and summary reports.

These reports show their herds' production cycles and key performance measures — such as calving percentage, weaning percentage and pounds of calf weaned per cow exposed at breeding — for use in herd-management decisions.

"The Association analyzes the production data and reports the information back to the individual producer," explains Bill Bowman, who coordinates the Angus BRS program. "Eventually a genetic value expressed as an estimated dollar difference (E\$D) will be developed for reproduction, growth and end-product merit, using the actual data submitted on each individual in addition to tying to the Angus database where possible."

In addition, Angus BRS enables commercial producers to characterize overall herd performance and to benchmark herd productivity against industry targets; to link performance results back to an individual sire, sire group, cow or a particular sire's daughters; to enhance producers' knowledge of their herds' carcass merit; and to supply key



PHOTO BY PAUL ANDRE

The goal of the Angus BRS program is vast genetic improvement and increased competitiveness for every producer who uses Angus genetics.

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information for use by potential buyers selecting genetics with added value.

In other words, it's exciting stuff, Rentschler says. “This information should really put power in the hands of producers because they are then able to see which cattle in their herds are performers and which ones should be sent down the road.”

“Through Angus BRS, producers also have a unique opportunity to characterize their commercial cattle by tying to the 40 years of performance data maintained by the American Angus Association,” Bowman adds. “We want to continue to expand the Association as an information source, broadening the Angus influence in a changing beef industry.”

To help producers better manage their information, the Association is adapting the

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Angus Information Management Software (AIMS) — long used by purebred Angus breeders — for use in a commercial cattle-production package, says Scott Johnson, director of AIMS. The software will enable commercial producers to submit performance information to the Association electronically and to more effectively manage their performance information.

The Association will work with producers who already have other herd-management software in place, Johnson adds. Angus BRS accepts electronic information from other software platforms. And, keep in mind, electronic data submission is not a necessity; hand-written forms are accepted.

Advantages

Once Angus BRS begins to play a larger role in commercial cattle production, representatives of the American Angus Association and commercial producers alike expect a number of benefits from the program.

- First, Angus BRS will make it possible for participating producers to make breeding and culling decisions based on fact rather than assumption. Angus BRS will help identify which cows are in the top 25% and which cows are in the bottom 25% of his herd, Rentschler says. “I believe it will help me make better culling decisions and become a more efficient producer. Before BRS, it was pretty much a guessing game.”
- Second, Angus BRS used in conjunction with national and electronic identification will provide a means of source verification, which in turn will enhance information flow, improve quality management, facilitate domestic value-based marketing and enhance access to



The potential information analysis obtained through Angus BRS makes the \$2/weaning weight fee a bargain, believes Nebraska cattleman Bryan Rentschler.

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export markets, Bowman says.

“In our opinion, future programs that require identification — such as voluntary certification, genetic evaluation, replacement-female development and feeder-calf quality assurance — could be voluntary systems that are necessary for market access,” he says.

- Third, Angus BRS will help identify Angus sires in commercial herds that may be untapped or “lost” sources of topflight genetics from which the entire breed could benefit.

“In fiscal year 1999, more than 40,000 Angus bulls were transferred to nonmember, or commercial, producers,” Bowman explains. “These bulls may represent some of the top genetics of the breed, but because little progeny data are collected and processed on these bulls, they often go undetected in the beef industry.

“The Angus BRS has the potential to build and to enhance working relationships among breeders and bull buyers by tracking the success of the sires in commercial herds.”

- Fourth, Angus BRS will help commercial producers improve carcass quality and consistency. “Angus BRS will help me interpret carcass information on the calves I produce,” adds Rentschler, who has begun retaining ownership on calves. “It’s important that I know what kinds of carcasses my cattle are producing.”
- Finally, Angus BRS will benefit all participating producers, whether they have 2,000 cows or 20. The program’s goal is vast genetic improvement and increased competitiveness for every producer who uses Angus genetics.

Tim Koeshall, who owns about 40 head of registered and

commercial Angus cows near Philadelphia, Tenn., sees great potential in Angus BRS for his small cow-calf operation.

In fact, Koeshall believes it’s more important now than ever for smaller-scale commercial operators to have some means of documenting the performance of their cow herds. After all, it’s often harder to attract buyer attention to small bunches of cattle than it is for someone with lots of calves to market, he says.

“With a small herd, it’s especially important that you breed for high-quality carcasses and good performance,” Koeshall says. “With Angus BRS, I can make better management decisions, add value to my cattle and hopefully make more money for the effort. I’m fairly certain it will help my profitability and put a few more pounds on the ground at the same time.

“I’ve already got my registered cow herd enrolled in the AHIR program, so it makes sense to have my commercial [herd] in a similar program,” Koeshall adds. “It doesn’t take me any extra effort than what I’m already doing, and I’m really looking forward to seeing which cows are performing best and which ones aren’t.”

Best of all, there is no cost to enroll a cow herd in the Angus BRS. The Association assesses a \$2 charge per calf weaning weight; this fee covers performance recording from conception to harvest, with summary reports throughout the production cycle.

“I think the fee is worth it,” Rentschler says. “You can’t get too much for \$2 anymore. It’s so important to have the kind of information that BRS offers the industry. Information is where the industry is going. You’ve got to know what you’ve got and how you can maximize your products in the marketplace. This is what BRS allows me to do.”



PHOTOS BY SHAUNA ROSE HERMEL

Angus BRS used in conjunction with national and electronic identification will provide a means of source verification, which in turn will enhance information flow, improve quality management, facilitate domestic value-based marketing and enhance access to export markets, says Bill Bowman, director of commercial relations for the American Angus Association.



Angus BRS offers commercial cattlemen a way to find the cattle that can perform profitably in the herd, in the feedlot and on the rail, as well as those that steal profitability year after year.