

# Predominantly Solid Black

Association owns adjusted USDA live-animal spec for Angus beef programs.

by **Steve Suther**, *Certified Angus Beef LLC*

**M**ost Angus producers know there are 10 carcass hurdles to clear for *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand qualification, but black hide is not one of those. Rather, it has always been a pre-qualifying phenotypic requirement. It's called the "Government Live Angus" (GLA), and it's used for all Angus brands.

Nothing much changed for 39 years, and little will change this year, but a refining adjustment excludes about one in 1,000 previously eligible, says Mark McCully, CAB vice president of production.

USDA announced the updated definition in effect July 1, 2017, after a request from CAB and the American Angus Association this spring.

"It simply clarifies the intent," McCully says.

The live specification was developed for Angus in 1978 as CAB became the first branded-beef program certified by USDA. Its language reflected a practical way for cattlemen, USDA and branded programs to identify Angus influence as "predominantly (51%) solid black."

"That was an objective and practical measure," McCully says, "but the specific percentage has created some misunderstanding over the years. Some thought the 51% referred to the percentage of Angus genetics or even the percentage of cattle in a pen that were black."

The GLA change evolves the phenotype requirement to more accurately describe Angus influence, while also reducing marketplace confusion, he says.

In addition, a new name for the USDA document reflects the Association's role in setting the live-cattle standard and establishes its ownership of that standard.

The live-animal specification now reads: American Angus Association's Specification for Characteristics of Cattle Eligible for Approved Beef Programs Claiming Angus Influence: "Have a main body that must be solid black, with no other color behind the shoulder, above the flanks, or breaking the midline behind the shoulders, excluding the tail."

A CAB 2017 feedyard audit suggests the change will have "essentially no impact" on the number of cattle identified as Angus type. More than 170,000 head on feed in Colorado and Texas — regions known for the highest prevalence of "non-solid-black" cattle — were classified to measure the frequency of Angus-type color patterns.

The study found that the clarification would affect less than 0.1% of cattle that were qualifying; 75% of all cattle were "Angus type" under the GLA definition in effect, and of course no dairy-influenced cattle were included in the audit, McCully says.

Of those 75%:

- ▶ 90.5% were "100% solid black;"
- ▶ 9.4% were "75%-99% solid black" defined as "not 100% solid black but no white behind the shoulders and no white above the flanks;" and
- ▶ 0.1% were "51%-74% solid black" defined as "likely receiving an A-stamp today but have white behind the shoulders or above the flanks."

"The long standing GLA definition served the industry well for many years," McCully says. "As cattle genetics and the marketplace have changed over time, the need also evolved for the phenotypic definition of "Angus type" to be more objective and in line with the intent of the original GLA."

The new definition provides that clarity and serves as a practical way to identify cattle with Angus influence while having a minimal impact on Angus program supplies, producer economics and plant logistics, he concludes.

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**Editor's Note:** Steve Suther is senior editor of producer communications for *Certified Angus Beef LLC*.

