

BY THE NUMBERS

by Kelli Retallick, Angus Genetics Inc.

Whole-herd reporting arrives at Angus

The American Angus Association's MaternalPlus™ program is whole-herd reporting.

Whole-herd reporting is not a new concept for the beef industry. In fact, whole-herd reporting is not a new concept to Angus.

In 2012, whole-herd reporting became available for Angus breeders, and since its inception, more than 50,000 females have been enrolled.

Some may wonder why they have not heard this term before. Well, the American Angus Association's whole-herd reporting program goes by the name MaternalPlus.

Even though the Association's program is not mandatory as with many other breeds, the benefits of whole-herd reporting outweigh any excuse to not be involved.

What is it?

Whole-herd reporting is simple. Instead of reporting and paying on a per-calf basis, members shift these resources to the cow. Most of the cow herd meets the existing requirements, but members tend to exclude themselves from reaping additional benefits by not enrolling in MaternalPlus.

If you are a member enrolled in AHIR® (Angus Herd Improvement Records) and annually report weights to the Association, most of your cows could readily be enrolled. The program only has three requirements to meet, including:

1. Submit heifer breeding records
And for each inventoried female:

2. Report calf record (weaning weight or pre-weaning disposal code), or

3. Record a reason or disposal code on females not reporting a calf or breeding record.

Why is it important?

Whole-herd reporting confirms members are accounting for every cow on their operation each year. This reporting makes the genetic evaluation relied on by members stronger. Reporting every calf to the database limits unintentional bias from entering the evaluation.

The program also opens doors for additional research goals to be reached. A recent survey conducted by the Association and Angus Genetics Inc. (AGI) had members rank traits most important to their operation. The message heard from the nearly 3,000 respondents, made up of primarily registered breeders, garnered cow longevity as the most important trait to the operation.

Longevity, or stayability, predicts how long cows will stay productive and viable in the herd. This trait plays a vital role in ranch profitability; whole-herd reporting paves the way for the Association to manufacture tools to capture this trait.

Producers may ask why the Association cannot use records already being submitted to derive such a tool, because in reality if a calf

record is reported on a female she is a success and if she does not report a calf she is a failure.

Unfortunately, it is not that easy.

While our members do an excellent job of record keeping, how do we account for those females that move into the donor pen or more commonly, non-transferred females sent into the commercial industry?

Without knowing what happened to these females, they would be categorized as failures mistakenly devaluing genetics in those pedigrees.

If marks of success and failure are arbitrarily placed on females based on cookie-cutter standards, how can members place faith in a genetic tool that does account for the whole picture? Whole-herd reporting does not leave room for any guess work.

Consistent disposal or culling code reporting also uncovers other important research topics. These codes allow for the tracking of issues witnessed by breeders throughout the industry which may not have caught the attention of research personnel to date.

For instance, the Association's newest expected progeny differences (EPDs) released by AGI include the foot score research EPDs, namely foot angle and claw set. This was a directive from the Board of Directors and the membership. If disposal codes were being accurately reflected

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in the database overtime, the issue may have been uncovered quicker and actions to correct these issues may have been implemented sooner.

What do I receive up front?

If more accurate data collection does not motivate individuals enough to get involved, the Association offers incentives for members enrolled in MaternalPlus. Being enrolled in whole-herd reporting is the only way for members to get any EPDs on unregistered calves.

Once calf birth or weaning weights are submitted on MaternalPlus-enrolled cows, calves will receive calving ease direct (CED), birth weight and weaning weight EPDs.

Additional herd management reports can be generated, including genetic trend reports that benchmark herd genetic progress against breed average, female age and disposal reports as well as production performance reports.

Finally, in April 2018 the Association announced a cash-back rebate program for enrolled members. Those enrolled in MaternalPlus receive 5% cash back on Association fees including membership, registration, transfer and AHIR® once they have completed their first re-enrollment, and a 2.5% cash back rebate for every year after that until 150,000 females are re-enrolled in the program.

Conclusion

With any additional data recording there is a cost — a member's time is money. The Association understands this, but as purveyors of the largest single breed national cattle evaluation in the world, it is our job to provide the programs that will yield the best results for you. Whole-herd reporting is the next step to ensure continued future success.

Signing up is easy. Log into your AAA account and on the main

screen look for “MaternalPlus.” Click to enroll your herd. Once your membership account is signed up, clean up your herd inventory by disposing females.

Don't use AAA Login? No problem. All the weaning weight, breeding and female disposal records can be sent to the office in the same manner you always have.

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Editors note: The Association has worked to make participation in whole-herd reporting as simple as possible. If you still have questions, feel free to contact the office at 816-383-5100.



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