



Heritage of Progress

Amid a tough year for farmers and ranchers, Association CEO Mark McCully finds optimism in the Angus breed.

by Julie Mais, editor

“Angus has a very rich and a very storied history,” said American Angus Association CEO Mark McCully as he stepped on stage to kick off the 2019 Angus Convention — his first in this new role. McCully welcomed the more than 1,700 Angus breeders in attendance to Reno, Nev., Nov. 2-4.

Reflecting on his first months at the helm of the Association, McCully said he is reminded daily of the breed’s historical significance and the responsibility he and staff have to continue its heritage.

“But,” he asks, “How do we honor that heritage and at the same time, be progressive? How do we look to the future, be innovative, making sure that what we’re doing as an Association is relevant to our members today and relevant to our members in the future?”

He turns to the breed’s history for that answer — which he said gives him an optimistic outlook.

Perseverance

“You guys know that better than I do, with me sitting in a comfy office, ... it’s been a tough, tough year. You

guys have been out dealing with the elements — floods, tough winters, and now our friends in California are dealing with fires.”

Looking to the history books, he said, “[Angus breeders] have

overcome. Whether it be things that Mother Nature throws at us, changing cattle types or changing tools and technologies, folks have persevered to put us in the

spot that we’re at today.”

Looking back in time, McCully said the history of leadership in the breed is perhaps the most profound. He noted leaders throughout the decades who dealt with controversial subjects like artificial insemination (AI). Leaders who recognized the need for more objective measures to improve the Angus breed, which in turn was the foundation for expected progeny differences (EPDs) and the sire evaluation.

“I think about later in the 1970s that group of Angus breeders who had the audacity to think that you can actually brand beef when they came together with this idea of *Certified Angus Beef*®(CAB),” he said.

“Leadership was on display through advertising [and breed promotion]. Some of you remember the ‘elephant ad’ that conveyed a message to lead an industry towards improving our end product.”

Reiterating the question of balancing heritage and progress, McCully concluded, “It’s become quite obvious to me that our heritage is, in fact, progress. It is about these leaders, about these families. It’s about those really tough decisions all about making the best better. And that’s inspiring to me. That gives me a tremendous amount of optimism about where we’re going.”

While McCully concedes in today’s climate, it can be tough for producers to be optimistic. “We’ve got stuff coming at us in our 24-hour news cycle, and 99% of it is negative,” he said. “Sometimes it’s hard to find the positive, yet we do it in production agriculture. We do it in the Angus business, and I stand up here today incredibly optimistic about where we are, where we’re going in this great breed of cattle in this incredibly strong Association serving this incredibly innovative and progressive membership.”

With headlines and accusations against the agricultural industry, McCully reminded the group that consumers are still eating meat. “CattleFax data projects next year the U.S. per capita consumption of red meat and poultry will be the highest



Mark McCully

it's been in 20 years," he explained. "The reality is we are in a business with a product that has an incredibly high demand, and we are producing the premium product, the most craved product within that whole category."

McCully added that the influence of Angus genetics in commercial herds and an intentional focus on improving the consumer eating satisfaction of the end product through those genetics is paying off in a big way.

"This change in our industry, many would say back in 2005 was not possible; but you guys proved them wrong using the tools that we have with a laser focus on making our product better, and look what we have today," McCully said. "Our industry does 80% Choice and Prime. We've doubled the percent that are premium Choice and Prime. CAB acceptance rates last year were 35%. It's an incredible story. That's a changing industry and we're giving the consumer an incredibly high-quality product."

The Angus toolbox

To remain successful and progressive in the cattle business today, McCully said breeders need a powerful toolbox.

"The Angus toolbox is so powerful and it obviously starts with our genetic selection tools," McCully said. The data behind Angus EPDs are the envy of the industry.

"We've got tools today cattlemen

can utilize to improve their herds in whichever direction they want to improve them," he said. "It's backed by a team of scientists and geneticists who are second to none, and who have your best interest in mind as they disseminate all of this really complicated science as tools for you to use."

"I still believe that today," he said. "I'm optimistic because of the Angus cow. She's the backbone of our commercial industry because she does so much so well. Even when we've tried to screw her up, she's resilient, and she's done a tremendous job for our commercial cattlemen who are making their livelihood in this business. We'll stay focused on making her the best we can to put us in a position to bring more value to our commercial cattlemen."

Underpinning McCully's outlook for the Angus breed, however, is the *Certified Angus Beef* brand.

Showing a photo of Amigos Foods, a large meat distribution company, in front of the Chicago skyline, McCully points out the CAB brand logo on their new warehouse.

"They represent thousands of products and various brands," he said. "Yet they've chosen one brand to paint on the side of their building. They've chosen one brand to put on the side of their truck. That's significant because the brand is that powerful to their business ... because it represents premium, it represents quality, it represents integrity."

The CAB brand, now in its 41st year, continues to drive the Angus breed forward. "I'm incredibly optimistic about where we're going."

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During the 2018 Angus Convention, McCully addressed Angus breeders with his "CAB hat on," and declared the Angus cow the unsung hero of the CAB brand's success.