

KEEP MOVING FORWARD

Entities overcame 2020 challenges, look forward with continued focus on members and customers.

by Kasey Brown, Angus Beef Bulletin associate editor

There is no question 2020 has had its share of curveballs, but the ability to pivot has uncovered silver linings in the Angus business. The four leaders of the American Angus Association entities sat down with Association CEO Mark McCully at the 2020 Angus Annual Meeting to discuss how each entity handled those curveballs and how they are keeping their eye on the future.

Angus Media

Angus Media President Brett Spader spoke on leveraging innovations this year, because you can't keep "a quarter-billion-dollar market down for long." As COVID-19 lockdowns

peaked in the spring right during bull-sale season, Angus Media used its reach and tools to help customers know whether sales were still on or to let customers know of changes.

Spader said it was more apparent than ever plans are necessary, but they must stay nimble.

"We really stress to our customers — let's have a plan to cope with COVID, to cope with these urgencies to get out from under them, but stay growth-minded," he asserted.

Digital retargeting has been a useful tool this year as plans changed and information needed to get to the right people. Pasture to Publish, an innovative tool offering a dashboard

approach to sales and sale books, was released this year. Spader hinted sale-day clerking software may be down the pipeline as a way to offer more analysis for purchase decisions. This will also open the door to customize the experience for commercial customers. These tools help usher in data usage in sales.

Speaking of data, Angus Media conducted reader surveys of its commercial and seedstock audiences. A key item found 94% of bull buyers rely on print. Cattlemen spend more time with media than ever before, Spader stressed, and it's imperative to integrate various types of media to best reach the targeted audience.



Leaders of the American Angus Association entities described how they addressed pandemic challenges.

Certified Angus Beef LLC

Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) President John Stika offered plenty of data to showcase how odd 2020 has been in the retail and beef supply sectors. For the past 13 years, CAB has enjoyed consecutive years of record growth. While this year was not the 14th record year, it did show major truths. Though CAB sales were down by 75 million pounds (lb.), they still reached 1.175 billion lb. sold, showing quality products retain demand.

Diversification in business helped the brand this year, as international sales decreased 64%, foodservice declined 70%, supply decreased about 60%, yet retail increased by 44% during the spring season and the peak of the pandemic.

“Retail really helped buoy us through some difficult times,” Stika said, but noted business is coming back. Foodservice has recovered to about 70% of what it was pre-COVID, and international is back to about 80% of expected volume.

The challenges have been in the hard assets, like a culinary center no longer able to host in-person educational events, requiring a change in game plans.

“The thing we’re proudest of is that we found ways to leverage every one of our people assets,” Stika said.

Customer service team members made calls to 700 individual retail stores and now want to figure out how to contact those stores more frequently. The culinary center team turned to offering virtual trainings — 10 in October alone. Through these new efforts, CAB still managed to have the third best year in its history, with 1.175 billion lb. sold.

Stika noted COVID has been different than a recession in that consumers have not lost confidence and have not been looking to trade

down in product quality. The market is still there, but how to put product in front of consumers changed. Stores are using the quality product as an anchor while delivery aspects change.

Angus Genetics Inc.

Angus Genetics Inc. (AGI) President Joel Cowley, who joined the team June 15, said he has been most impressed with the talent of AGI team members and their ability to adapt. He was quick to praise the customer service team, who adapted to working from home during peak COVID restrictions. They maintained the communication and responsiveness members have come to expect and turned even their homes into processing facilities for the genetic samples received.

2020 has been a successful year for AGI, rolling out a new research expected progeny difference (EPD), moving another from research to official status and introducing three new selection indexes. The research hair shedding and pulmonary arterial pressure (PAP) EPDs will help cattlemen select cattle that will thrive within specific environments.

The combined value index (\$C) gives cattlemen a single tool to help balance traits across the entire beef supply chain. Two new Angus-on-dairy indexes, one for Holsteins and one for Jerseys, will allow Angus to grow its share of the beef-on-dairy market by addressing issues associated with straight dairy calves, which have always contributed to the beef supply.

“Our job is to fill the genetic selection toolbox,” Cowley said. Leveraging the power of the Angus database, which was created through the submission of phenotypes and genomic tests by members, a talented AGI team can create new tools and

refine existing ones.

He also said commercial cattlemen can suffer from “analysis paralysis,” which can be combated with selection indexes. AGI has the opportunity to develop indexes that will assist cattlemen in selecting Angus genetics to fit specific production environments and marketing methods.

Angus Foundation

Angus Foundation Executive Director Thomas Marten joined Team Angus in January of 2020. He said there are a lot of encouraging things happening in the Angus Foundation and excitement around their core mission of supporting youth, education and research.

Reaching donors and creating relationships in a COVID environment has been a new challenge, but a worthy one, he said.

“It was hard to lose events this summer that we treasure, but the team found new ways to gather juniors that work with the pandemic to create leaders for our breed, industry and rural communities,” Marten said.

Two new EPDs were developed through research funded by Angus Foundation donors. Foundation staff are taking a wholistic approach to fund their core mission areas and thinking big about how to grow impact. Marten also said a silver lining of the year was finding new operational efficiencies.

He invited breeders to support the Angus Foundation Jan. 9 for the Oklahoma Stars fundraising gala to be hosted during the Cattlemen’s Congress in Oklahoma City. [AJ](#)