



KEEPING THE LEADING BREED IN THE LEAD

Innovation at Angus panel features entity leadership.

by Miranda Reiman, director of digital content and strategy

“At the end of the day, this is about your success.”

Mark McCully, American Angus Association CEO, closed the “Innovations at Angus” panel during the 2023 Angus Convention with that summary sentiment. Leadership from each of the Association’s entities gathered on stage in Orlando, Fla., in November to share specific programs, tools and examples developed to help breeders accomplish their goals.

McCully framed the on-stage review of the fiscal year highlights as “just a snapshot.”

He said the group — which included Kelli Retallick-Riley, Angus Genetics Inc. (AGI); Jaclyn Boester, Angus Foundation; John Stika, Certified Angus Beef (CAB); and Clay Zwilling, Angus Media — was a representation of the staff who work to advance the mission.

Angus cattlemen and the breed have a heritage of innovation, McCully said, noting that keeps the Association trying to help prepare for what’s coming.

“This morning is really about showcasing some of what has been going on in the past year and some of what we’re thinking about looking down the road,” he said.

Angus Genetics Inc.

With its research focus, innovation is engrained heavily into the day-to-day at AGI, and October saw a culmination of two big projects in that realm.

Oct. 25, they launched the functional longevity (FL) expected progeny difference (EPD) in a research form.

“This has been one that’s been a long time coming,” Retallick-Riley said. “You all as members have been working to build this

tool up and collect the necessary data in order for us to even get at a genetic tool that then we could predict and get in your hands.”

The team expects more tweaks to the EPD before its full release.

“We want to make sure we stress that this is a research EPD, and this is your EPD and your tool,” Retallick-Riley said. “The more feedback that we can get so we can fine-tune that tool to make it as accurate as possible, is going to be helpful for us.”

A few weeks earlier, AGI added Angus Australia’s herd book to the National Cattle Evaluation (NCE), which has included Canadian data since 2000, to form the World Angus Evaluation.

“It increases the number of phenotypic records, allowing us to create more accurate genetic predictions,” Retallick-Riley said, noting there are some genetic

lines used more prevalently Down Under than here in North America. “So, we’re characterizing places in your pedigree where we lacked phenotypic records before.”

In addition to increasing accuracy, it also helps simplify and encourage international commerce between the countries, she says.

A major research focus for AGI this year was gathering more heart scores to learn more about possible genetic links with bovine congestive heart failure (BCHF). Unlike birth weights or ultrasound records, it’s not a measure breeders can regularly incorporate into their normal data collection, she explained, so AGI worked with partners to gather those in plants.

“As we look to that work we did with Kansas State University, it became pretty clear that this probably wasn’t quite as simple as some were making it seem out there in the industry at the time, and there wasn’t just a singular group of cattle that seemed to be affected by this particular disease,” Retallick-Riley said.

Angus Foundation

As the landscape changes around funding education and research, the role of organizations like the Angus Foundation becomes even more important, McCully said. Breeders supported fundraising in a big way in 2023 from gifts like pregnancies and the Foundation Heifer Package to the Angus Day of Giving.

“I just can’t say thank you enough,” Boester said.

She shared the success they’ve had funding (everything from the Beef Leaders Institute to the BCHF research) is a direct result

of the generosity of the Angus membership.

“We’ve had an incredible year,” Boester said, noting she wants giving to be accessible to every member.

The Legacy Built Campaign launched in May as a new program encouraging breeders to give \$150 to the unrestricted fund in celebration of 150 years of Angus coming to America. Those donations are being matched by eight ranches who stepped up as George Grant Challengers, meaning every dollar was multiplied and will hopefully total more than \$300,000 for the unrestricted fund.

Several videos showed on stage allowed members to voice support for the Angus Foundation in their own words.

“If we are really going to sustain the Angus business, we have to bring along those young people to sustain the business, and I think the [Angus] Foundation is a great tool to do that with all the programs they have,” said Tom McGinnis in one clip. “I want to be a part of it, and I’m going to do everything I can do to support it. I hope we can entice a lot of the other people to do the same.”

Certified Angus Beef

Continuing the theme of successes in the rearview, Stika shared CAB partners sold 1.227 billion pounds of *Certified Angus Beef*®-brand product in the most recent fiscal year. That’s the third highest year in the history of the brand, and the eighth consecutive year above a billion pounds.

“You as Angus producers need to take a big portion of the credit for that kind of success on the supply side,” Stika said.

Angus-influenced cattle represented a record of 71.5% of all fed cattle harvested, with a second-highest ever acceptance rate of 36.2% of Angus-influenced cattle meeting all 10 brand specifications.

The brand debuted a new product line, *Certified Angus Beef*® *Grass-Fed by Niman*, with longtime partner Niman Ranch. Stika does not expect a big volume of product under this new label, but it may bring in new business or keep partners at the table.

“It’s an opportunity for us to offer one more choice to our partners and consumers who are looking for high-quality *Certified Angus Beef* (product) under this production system,” he said.

Consumers can find locally sourced CAB through a growing number of Ranch to Table™ partners.

“It’s a program unveiled with the design to support registered Angus breeders who want to market direct-to-consumer *Certified Angus Beef* product that’s sourced directly from their own genetics and raised on their own farms and ranches,” Stika noted.

Three pilot partners helped them learn about challenges in grading access at small plants, ways to customize marketing support and how to scale the program so that more ranches can participate in this coming year.

In another effort to connect what happens on the ranch with consumers who want to know more of the story, CAB and longtime foodservice distribution partner Sysco have teamed up for the Raised with Respect Cattle Care Initiative. The collaboration aims to get more cattlemen Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) certified

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and will focus on nine trainings in key cattle-producing regions.

“Our customers and consumers are asking more questions about how cattle are being raised and, honestly, it’s been a great opportunity for us to engage in conversations that ultimately benefit all of us if we engage them with openness and clarity and honesty,” Stika said.

Research shows consumer trust increases with certifications, so CAB has used BQA as a tool to help producers get credit for the cattle care work they’re already doing, he said.

Angus Media

When breeders are working hard on their genetics, Angus Media exists to help them make certain their potential customers know.

Zwilling made his Angus Convention debut after joining the team as Angus Media president in May.

“It’s been a real pleasure to get to know the Angus family over the last several months. It’s been a great journey,” he said, admitting there’s been a learning curve to know all the products and services the team offers. “When people ask what’s Angus Media got going on, whether they’re a breeder, or a staff member or a Board member ... the answer, to be pretty direct, is a lot.”

In addition to the award-winning *Angus Journal* and *Angus Beef Bulletin*® publications, the print services, web, digital advertising and print advertising teams work together to offer innovative solutions to Angus breeders and corporate clients.



Clay Zwilling, Angus Media president, shared ways the marketing entity can come alongside Angus breeders to help them prepare for sale day.

Pasture to PublishSM is an example that has both made the product better and, hopefully, the experience even better for buyers and sellers, Zwilling said.

“We’ve really tried to streamline the sale book and design process to make it more efficient, make it an easier process, so we can cut the clutter and help folks make their sale-day preparation experience better,” he said, sharing examples like auto-populating with live EPDs, streamlining requests for hard-copy books and adding videos by lots.

Analytics on the back end help define what’s working and where there is opportunity.

On a much broader scale, that’s what this year’s Industry Insights — a comprehensive survey about the structural changes and the future of the cow-calf and feedlot sectors — gives breeders. The survey is a partnership between Angus Media and CattleFax and gives a third-party perspective.

“There’s so much good information in there that I think really helps us as seedstock breeders to understand our customer, understand the direction of the breed,” McCully said.

Zwilling invited breeders to interact with Angus Media staff or to use the Sale Day Calculator, which allows breeders to get a

customized to-do list with dates and deadlines.

“While Angus Media offers a wide variety of products, really what we want to do is get to know our folks and really sit down and have a conversation around what are they trying to achieve. What are their goals?” he said. “We want to come alongside them as partners to make them successful here in the Angus business, to make sure that they’re sustainable and profitable.”

Encouraging engagement

The session gave a fast look at each of the entities, but McCully said he hopes that was the start of more two-way conversations.

“We want to hear what’s working well. We want to hear what’s not working so well, and enter into some great, healthy dialogue,” he encouraged the crowd. “I know I speak on behalf of the entire Board of Directors, they invite that. They want to know: where do we need to be today to make sure that you’re successful tomorrow?” [AJ](#)