

LEAD IN

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Association Works to Make Shows More Relevant to Industry

The Association Board for many years has been encouraged by some breeders to make shows more relevant to the industry. In the eyes of others, shows already are relevant. While certain trends have occurred in the show ring over the years, some cattlemen say that shows and those changes have been an advantage for the Angus breed.

Different opinions didn't keep your Board from addressing this issue in Long-Range Planning two years ago. The Board and staff continue to look at ways the show ring and shows can be made more useful and meaningful for both junior and adult events.

The first and most obvious way shows are important, to many of us in Association work, is in junior activities. Many young men and women start in the business by showing a heifer or steer. Because thousands of young people get started this way, shows become a focal point for competition, good times and fellowship with other youngsters. The show ring and related activities become the catalyst for learning genetics, the value of performance, sportsmanship, animal fitting and grooming and competition. Experience with my own children has shown me that the placings are virtually a mute point compared to the value of the experience they gain.

With this in mind, junior shows have taken on a new look in recent times. The inclusion of terminal steer carcass shows, speech, photo and poster contests and team sales competition at the National Junior Angus Show are just a few of the ways that junior shows have taken on a new dimension. In addition, the 25 percent added premium money for entries enrolled in the AHIR program encourages youngsters to weigh and measure cattle growth and become involved in programs on the farm or ranch.

Young Angus breeders have grasped many of these new "show" activities. I'm sure the list of events will continue to grow and young people will continue to take advantage of these opportunities.

The next step in making open shows more relevant, according to some cattlemen, would be to use more performance information in making the placings. At first glance, this appears to be a simple way to make open shows more meaningful.

A second look, however, shows the complexity of using measures such as weight, WDA, backfat, ribeye area and frame, along with at least

four EPDs for birth, milk, weaning and yearling weight and objectively placing a ring full of cattle in a realistic period of time. It almost becomes necessary to evaluate the performance traits before the show if the event is to run smoothly.

Two excellent efforts in the past two years have occurred at the All-American Breeders' Futurity and a special performance show at the California State Fair. Both events have helped plow the ground for performance shows of the future.

There's one thing about using performance information in shows that everyone will agree on. There will be agreement and disagreement with the judge or judges on their evaluation of performance, just as there is in the evaluation of cattle on type alone. We have reached a point in our business where increases in growth, milk production and frame size are not always desirable. We must remember that objective AHIR data is subjectively evaluated by a breeder or a show judge just as is the structure and type of each animal led into the ring or retained in a breeding herd.

In recent months, the Association has extended an offer to all show management to work with them in making available current EPD information on show animals. This data would likely be the most useful information to help make judging decisions in performance shows and classes. In addition, the Board approved a show classification for performance shows in 1992.

It does not appear that the Association Board should, or would even want to, state how each piece of AHIR performance data or EPD would be "weighted" in show placings. The consensus on this point appears to be as varied as breeding programs themselves. Providing AHIR data (mainly EPDs) to show viewers and the judge might accomplish one of the most important objectives in performance/type shows, and that is to make viewers aware of AHIR and the inclusion of EPD and other objective information into successful breeding programs.

The ongoing effort to make both junior and open shows more relevant to the industry is a high priority of the Association's Board. Some steps have already been taken and more will follow.

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