

Angus Stakes

by Shauna Rose Hermel, editor



It's in your best interest

Let's say I have a customer who wants me to paint his barn a certain shade of green. Now I have a good supply of yellow paint and some blue, but not enough to yield the palatable green desired by the customer. I know because I already tried mixing it.

You're my paint supplier. You have plenty of all colors of paint that you're more than willing to sell me at a fair price. In fact, you have the exact shade I want. But I can't afford to dump the bluish-yellow paint I have now and buy enough of the right shade to do the job. I want you to sell me the blue paint I need to mix with what I have to get the shade of green that will please my customer.

Your first question: "What shade and how much blue do you need?"

My response: "I don't know. You're the expert. You tell me."

Since this is a phone call, you ask: "What are the ID numbers on the yellow paint and on the green paint?"

Me: "Oh, I used yellow No. 3457 and blue No. 5628."

You: "Well, how much of each did you mix, and how much total paint do you have?"

Me: "I don't know. I used the best paint available, and I mixed what I had. The neighbor had some blue paint and wanted to help. We added it, though I'm not quite sure what it was. The mixture still isn't quite right. Can you come take a look?"

Since you're a concerned paint supplier, you agree to come out and look at my old water tank half-filled with the mixed paint.

Well, it's a tub of paint, and it needs more blue.

I'm leaving the responsibility in your hands. After all, you're the expert.

Let's approach this from a different angle. I'm a commercial cattleman. You are a seedstock supplier. I read a lot of beef industry magazines and the *Angus Beef Bulletin* at my veterinarian's office, so I'm pretty smart.

I know I have a better chance of making a profit if I can market 735-pound (lb.) Yield Grade (YG) 2 carcasses that grade high-Choice or Prime. I'm determined to retain ownership and to sell on a grid system. After all, I want to satisfy the consumer and secure

my place in the industry, and I want you to sell me the bull I need to market cattle of those specifications whose herdmates still will produce efficiently in my environment.

Your first question: "What kind of EPDs are you looking for?"

My response: "I don't know. You're the expert. You tell me."

Since this is a phone call, you ask: "What type of cattle do you have?"

Me: "Crossbred. I started out with Dad's Herefords, then added some Simmental and some Limousin and a couple Angus."

You: "What percent British and what percent Continental blood do you have in the herd?"

Me: "I don't know. I used the best bulls available — even bought them at performance-tested bull sales. They all had papers and EPDs, but I never got the papers transferred to myself, and I can't remember what the EPDs were. I was in a real pinch one year and used the neighbor's bull. I'm not sure what he was, but he was black. Can you come take a look?"

Since you're a concerned seedstock supplier, you agree to come out and look at my cows.

Well, it's a herd of cows.

The good news is that I took weaning weights last year, so I do have them to use as a benchmark. The bad news is that I don't know what each of the bulls contributed to those weaning weights. And because I was in a drought area, I sold 20% of my cows, so I'm not even really dealing with the same herd.

EPDs are a great way to help move a herd in a direction, but in which direction do you need to help me go? Does my herd need more or less milk? Bigger or smaller ribeyes? Heavier or lighter cattle at finishing? Maybe the questions should focus on which of my cows need to be mated to a high-growth bull and which ones don't.

The reality is that you can't tell me which bull from your herd is going to get me closest to the target I want to hit. The reality is that I probably need to divide my herd into subsets, each one needing a different bull with a particular set of EPDs.

The reality is that, if you're going to

continue filling the needs of your customers, for your sake and theirs you need to help get them enrolled in the Angus Beef Record Service (BRS). Developed by the American Angus Association Commercial Relations Department, this recordkeeping system provides a framework for collecting information on the commercial progeny of your seedstock from conception to consumption.

Just as Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR) helped Angus seedstock producers pinpoint the performance attributes of individual cows and bulls, Angus BRS will help commercial producers describe their cow herds. That will give both you and your customers a better picture of what their genetic needs are in the future. By identifying repeatedly poor performers, commercial cattlemen can increase their productivity. Consider the giant leap in quality and consistency that could be made in the national cow herd.

You and your customers will gain valuable information about the bulls you sell by being able to get information on their progeny. With the assistance of dedicated feedlots through the Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) Feedlot Licensing Program, the collection of information doesn't have to stop at weaning. The door is open to information gathering and sharing at the feedlot and the packinghouse.

In his "Merchandising" columns, Keith Evans has proposed repeatedly that you shouldn't sell a bull to someone without knowing in what kind of herd the bull is to be used. Customer satisfaction depends upon it, and your livelihood depends on customer satisfaction.

To encourage commercial cattlemen to participate in Angus BRS, some Angus producers already have helped customers enroll herds. Some have even paid the \$2/weaning weight to process progeny data. If you're not one of those seedstock suppliers, you're competing with them.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Shauna".

e-mail: shermel@angusjournal.com