ASSOCIATION

# Up Front

► by ***John Crouch,*** *executive vice president*

## Angus EPDs define production, reproduction and composition

*We are just more than one month into the third year of the new millennium, and the future of the Angus breed and Angus breeders could not loom brighter. By the time this column appears in print, a new set of Angus expected progeny differences (EPDs) will have made its way to the computers, kitchen tables and pickup dashboards of the many cattlemen, both commercial and purebred, who rely on data for completing the seedstock selection process.*

### Multiple traits

A review of the vast amounts of information made available free of charge to the beef industry is overwhelming at first glance. Further examination leads one to separate EPDs into three categories: production, reproduction and composition.

The production data primarily concerns comparisons of measures of growth and height. The database from which the data comes is of tremendous magnitude. For growth traits alone there are more than 9,254,400 observations with some 750,000 added annually. The current calf crop is sired by more than 19,000 sires; hence the maintenance of genetic diversity within the Angus breed is assured.

From time to time the comment is made that Angus breeders are practicing single-trait selection for marbling. My response is that one could not practice single-trait selection for marbling within the Angus breed if one really wanted to. An examination of the growth and milk EPDs for those 19,820 bulls that sired calves in the past two years reveals the following averages:

| BW | WW | MILK | YW |
|---|---|---|---|
| +2.7 | +35 | +17 | +64 |

I fully realize that extremes do exist within the population; but, for an average, that's fantastic.

The same averages for the same traits in 101,851 bulls born in 2001 revealed:

| BW | WW | MILK | YW |
|---|---|---|---|
| +2.6 | +34 | +17 | +64 |

From these observations one could easily conclude that the genetic values of the current population of Angus cattle are certainly well-balanced for growth and milk.

### Forge ahead

In an effort to maximize improvement in body composition, Angus breeders have overwhelmingly adopted the technology provided by ultrasound. This tremendous breakthrough occurred in 1997 as a result of research at Iowa State University (ISU) that was funded, in part, by the American Angus Association.

Since the data set is still young, improvements in composition have not been realized to the fullest extent because of the slow generation interval. Time cures all, and, given time, the results from the

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selection process will be manifested throughout our industry. In just a scant four years, and due to the progressive nature of Angus breeders, almost 380,000 purebred Angus animals have ultrasound body composition EPDs.

There are many facets and many faces to the purebred seedstock industry. There are differing opinions on the ideal type and kind of animal we should produce based largely on environment, and further on consumer needs. While these many facets exist, one fact is crystal clear — the tools we have at our fingertips provide a great common denominator in making decisions that affect directional change in seedstock.

For many years cattlemen felt that breed and herd improvement represented incremental increases in a given trait over time. Nothing could be further from the truth. Rather, the key to maximum herd improvement is to find the optimum genetic balance between growth, milk and composition as it relates to reproduction. The real challenge, then, becomes one of maintaining that level of genetic value. And no matter what facet of the industry we occupy, ultimately we are still in the food business.

This month hundreds of Angus breeders will sell thousands of Angus bulls to crowds of commercial producers from across the country. While the majority will likely be repeat buyers, a few of them might be using Angus genetics in their herds for the first time. A lot of factors figure into why those buyers have chosen to spend their hard-earned dollars with you this year, but it is certain that the pedigree and predictable genetic information they get with a registered Angus bull rank high at the top of the list.

Let's do everything we can, including continuing to build our genetic database, transferring the papers on these commercial herd sires and providing a high level of customer service to their owners, to make sure those crowds come back next year.

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