

# No Hoof, No Horse

*Without a solid foundation, plans and cattle will crumble under pressure.*

*by Lindsay King, assistant editor*

The old saying goes: no hoof, no horse. This holds true for cattle as well. Staff from the American Angus Association explained the importance and proper procedures for foot scoring cattle at an Angus University workshop, sponsored by Merck Animal Health, during the Angus Convention hosted in Columbus, Ohio, Nov. 3-5, 2018.

“The seedstock industry exists as a business to meet the needs of the commercial cattleman,” said Alex Tolbert, American Angus Association regional manager. “The seedstock industry needs to provide a good product that will improve a herd from both a production and longevity standpoint.”

Tolbert compared the foot structure of cattle to the foundation of a building. He explained how producers sometimes forget to go back to the basics of cattle evaluation.

“The foundation of anything is pivotal,” he said. “When I evaluate cattle, I look at their side profile. I can get an idea of the animal’s structure and how it will travel.”

## Measure to manage

If something is not measured, it becomes hard to manage. This is where foot scoring comes in as an asset for producers.

“There are about five guidelines for foot scoring, but these are the more important ones: score before trimming, score the worst foot, and score as yearlings,” said Jeff Mafi, American Angus Association

regional manager. “We take a score for foot angle and claw set — those are lumped into one score.”

When evaluating foot angles, it is important to look at length of the toe, depth of the heel and set, or angle, to the pastern.

Foot score is measured on a 1-9 scale. Five is the ideal number for both angle and claw set. Scores should be taken on a hard, flat surface. Concrete is generally preferable.

“All four feet should be evaluated independently,” Mafi added. “We want the cattle to stand naturally and be able to watch their movement.”

## Foot score EPD

Foot scores can be tough data to collect, but is imperative to the success of the newly updated foot score research expected progeny difference (EPD) launched in January from Angus Genetics Inc. (AGI).

“We started collecting foot score data in 2015 and last February we started collecting mature cow foot scores,” said Kelli Retallick, AGI genetic services director. “As yearlings, it is hard to pick up variation on foot scores.”

By adding variation, accuracy of the EPD will increase. Of the 5,000



Jeff Mafi, regional manager, was one of three American Angus Association employees explaining the importance of foot scores.

sets of data collected on mature cows, very few scored on the lower end of the scale (1-4).

“We created an EPD for both phenotypes but ignored scores 1-4 because we don’t see those animals in large enough quantities to predict for that,” Retallick explained. “We want to select the small EPD score to get closer to the ideal number.”

The audience shared their concerns with Retallick about selecting for progressively smaller foot scores. They worried this would take them below the ideal foot score and into the undesirable 1-4 scores.

“Since we are not using those scores in the calculation, this EPD will not set you up for failure,” Retallick said as she explained how an increase in 1-4 foot scores meant a new EPD for that side of the scale would need to be developed. 