

High-Tech Evaluation

Performance is the name of the game in today's Angus industry. For the second consecutive year, Angus cattle exhibited at the National Western Stock Show were measured for hip height (frame) scrotal circumference and weight. In addition, backfat measurements were taken by ultrasound scanner.

This information was printed in the show catalogs and was given to judges in the Pens and Carload Show, Sale Bull Show as well as the ROV Angus Show to aid in their cattle evaluation.

The American Angus Association didn't take this task lightly. Officials hired the best ultrasound technicians in the business to conduct and record backfat measurements on close to 400 head of cattle during check-in days preceding the show. For a small fee, breeders could also have their animal's ribeye measurement taken.

The most notable technician present was Jim Stouffer, the father of animal ultrasound. This former Cornell University animal scientist has been involved in ultrasonic research and development for more than 30 years. He developed the first animal ultrasonic scanner, Scanogram, in 1968. Today he is president of his own company called, Animal Ultrasound Services Inc., in Ithaca, N.Y.

With consumers demanding meat with less external fat, today's Angus breeders have the added challenge of efficiently breeding it off rather than having retailers or packers trim it off, Stouffer says. Even more of a challenge is being paid for the true value of your cattle and carcasses, rather than "on the average."

The trend toward performance cattle also has influenced seedstock producers to obtain more data on their animals to calculate carcass trait EPDs and make quicker, more correct decisions in their breeding programs.

The ultrasound scanner is just one tool breeders can use to accomplish these goals. Animal scientists admit there is great need for an accurate and efficient measure of body composition, fat thickness and ribeye area in live animals and carcasses. Although the ultrasound scanner isn't perfect, it's the best tool we have to work with.

— Jerilyn Johnson



Colorado State University grad student *Craig Huffhines* (center) measures hip height for frame score, with the help of American Angus Association regional managers, *Don Laughlin* and *Bruce Weeter*, during cattle check-in at the National Western Stock Show.



Jim Stouffer (sitting second from right) of *Animal Ultrasound Service Inc.* analyzes ultrasound measurements. *NJAA* director *Kellie Coonrad* (right) records the data, while bull exhibitor *EL-don Krebs* (far left) looks on.



This Angus heifer is ultrasonically measured for backfat thickness, an indicator of external fat.