

Living Advertisement

The National Western Angus Bull Sale provides producers a place to showcase their cattle.

Story & photos by **Corinne Blender**

A good picture of a bull is worth a thousand words — but the real thing is a priceless advertisement.

The Angus bull sale at the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) is one way advertising becomes the “real thing.” Breeders like Charlie Boyd, Boyd Beef Cattle, Mays Lick, Ky., have seen firsthand, the effects of this form of advertising and its priceless value.

“I give the Denver bull sale a lot of credit for our success because we’ve had four champions and two reserves in the last eight years,” Boyd says. “And I think that’s helped our bull sale program just in the terms of notoriety and recognition of our cattle.”

In fact, since the time Boyd began showing and selling his bulls through the sale in Denver, he has seen his own Angus program take off. He has doubled his herd size and says he has seen nearly a 60%-70% increase in his embryo program.

“It’s a nice launching pad for

a herd sire if you have the right bull,” Boyd says.

Troy Adams, Broken Arrow Angus Ranch, Lincoln, Calif., says he agrees that it is the right environment to promote Angus cattle.

“The National Western Stock Show is the Super Bowl of cattle shows,” Adams says. “It provides the atmosphere and turnout of people to allow breeders to promote and sell their product.”

The American Angus Association sponsors the National Western Angus Bull Sale. The event is governed by the Association’s Board of Directors, which selects judges and sets the rules and regulations for the show and sale.

Before the sale, breeders exhibit their bulls in a showing competition judged by a panel of five judges. Each panel member places the class. The five scores are added together, and the low score wins the class. The top two placings are announced to the crowd. Since each class makes up its own

division, those top two animals are the champion and reserve animals of their division.

Division winners compete for grand and reserve grand honors.

Buyers judge

After division champions and grand champions are named, the real judging can begin.

The bulls are paraded back into the arena after the conclusion of the show. A flood of potential buyers then storms into the ring to evaluate the animals and to talk to the breeders about their programs.

“The five-judge program works well. I remember back when one judge did the show,” says Donald Bloom, Bloom Angus Farm, Westville, Ind. “But the best judges are the cowboys who buy the bulls on sale day.”

Bloom and his family have



► Prior to the sale, a panel of five judges evaluates the bulls in the showing, naming division champions and grand champions.

been participants in the sale for 20 years, and through this time he has seen the cowboy judges pick their own champions, too. “One year I showed a bull who placed third, but was high-selling bull in the sale,” Bloom says.

Both the show and sale truly are marketing tools. There is always a certain amount of talk each year about the best sale bull in the barn, Bloom points out, but the bulls are still sought after for their own merits in the eyes of the buyers.

“It’s nice to win a division or have champion,” Boyd agrees. “But I think after you go past half a dozen bulls, these people know what they want within their own programs and price variation is probably not that much of a factor based on how you placed in the show.”

A place to start

Boyd, Adams and Bloom say



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there is one clear thing that the Denver bull sale can do for small-scale breeders wanting to develop a market for their bulls.

"I believe the Denver bull sale gives an opportunity for smaller breeders to showcase their programs on the national level by selling the very best bulls their programs can produce," Bloom says.

For a new breeder who has a good breeding program but hasn't developed a bull market, the National Western Angus Bull Sale would be a nice place to get recognition to start marketing bulls, Boyd adds.

For breeders like Boyd, Denver provides a market for his bulls in the Midwest. After Boyd established his market, he was able to start his own production sale in Kentucky. Still, he continues to bring bulls to Denver.

"It led into our bull sale, and that is why we do both. Because it's certainly good exposure here," Boyd says, "but it still helps us throughout the rest of the year at home."

Repeat customers stemming from exposure to the cattle are one way the sale advertises the bulls.

"We don't always advertise our bulls, because after so many years our buyers always come by and look us up," Bloom says. "Word of mouth is our best advertisement."

A target setter

Over the years, the bull sale has adapted and changed with the trends, Bloom says. He has seen the focus move from growth to milk to moderate-framed cattle and, finally, to carcass quality. These advancements have made sellers



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focus on their future, but Bloom says one key player has held true to her course.

"Thank goodness for the Angus cow," he says. "She has withstood the test of time."

The competition and sale help establish targets for producers to reach.

"The buyers in Denver are looking for a unique individual to add to their programs," Adams says. "The competition at the National Western Stock Show has caused us to be more aggressive, which in turn has helped advance our program."

The sale provides more than

just a target market and goals to obtain, however. It also provides feedback to its consignors, especially those who are marketing some of the same genetics back home.

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Preparing for Denver starts more than just a week in advance. Since the Denver sale is such a strong marketing tool, Adams says there is a lot of

legwork that must be done before he gets there. It takes more effort than just getting the bulls ready for the show to make the marketing plan progress. A good marketing plan equals benefits for both the buyer and the seller.

"There is a benefit to the buyers because it is a way for them to see the bull out of the stall and in the showing. And, with the crowd it draws, it is good exposure for the bull consignors," Adams says. "As far as the sale goes, it still comes down to marketing your product regardless the outcome of the show."

The bulls say a lot for themselves, but part of the lasting marketing effect comes from the great friends and cattlemen who come to see the NWSS each year.

"From a marketing standpoint this is the most expensive show in terms of what it costs to come," Boyd says. "But it has a lasting effect throughout the year just from the exposure we get from the people who see our cattle."



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