

by Mark McCully
CEO, American Angus Association



Strength in diversity

I have often said the diversity of the American Angus Association membership is both one of our biggest challenges and yet one of our biggest strengths.

In fiscal year 2021, the Association had 23,006 active adult and junior members, with members in all 50 states. Of those members, 13,170 registered cattle in the last year.

Yet the most interesting illustration of the diversity of Association membership is the wide range in size. Of the members registering cattle, 76% registered 19 head or less. All combined, those cattle accounted for 17% of the Angus cattle registered in the year.

On the flip side, less than 5% of members registered more than 99 animals, but combined they account for just shy of half (49%) of the total registrations last year.

As Association staff, we take a lot of pride in treating every member equally, whether they have one cow or thousands. However, we also recognize the member with five cows is probably looking to the Association differently than the member with 500 cows. These differences can become challenging for an organization like ours.

Likewise, we know regardless of size, each member has their own goals and objectives for their herd. We must offer programming and services to meet that diverse need, knowing not all members will find equal value in each program offered.

The show ring is the lifeblood for some of our members, and yet others find little to no direct benefit. Association-sponsored social events are very important to some members, yet others rarely participate. Some members are performance breeders, with a heavy emphasis on growth and carcass traits. Other performance herds have a maternal focus or are working hard to strike a balance of all economically important traits. On top of that, the range in geography and environment is as different as you might imagine.

With that diversity comes strength. Differences in breeding objectives provide a diverse gene pool in registered Angus seedstock. With powerful expected progeny differences (EPDs) in hand, a breeder can make directional change in his cow herd in line with their goals.

Each of those members needs a variety of programs. To illustrate the diversity even further, every breeder has a different starting point. Some have been breeding cattle for decades and have amassed enough knowledge to have earned a doctorate in animal breeding. Others are just getting started. They are eager to learn but are seeking information that is more basic in nature.

Table 1: Percent of membership registering Angus cattle by number of head

Members registering	Percent of membership	Percent of registrations
Less than 20 head	76%	17%
More than 99 head	5%	49%

For the Board of Directors and the staff, it can be hard to know how to designate resources, but we welcome this challenge and know this diverse membership base is far more of a strength and something to be embraced and celebrated. I believe the Association's role is to support this diverse philosophy and work to support breeders' success as they pursue their customer and market needs now and in the future.

The beauty of diversity is that it inspires growth, and our Association is stronger because of it. That diversity of thought and perspective will certainly be necessary to meet the challenges of our future. **A**

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