



# Up Front

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

## The value of Angus females

*Each year about this time, pastures, paddocks and the open range are dotted with baby calves being fussed over by doting brood cows. Therefore, it is only fitting that the American Angus Association's Pathfinder Report appears in this issue of the Angus Journal.*

### Purpose of Pathfinder program

The idea to compile and print the *Pathfinder Report* was adopted by the Association Board of Directors in 1978. Pathfinder status was designed with two things in mind — (1) to pay tribute to Angus herd matrons that perform their basic function without flaw and (2) to recognize breeders and herds that participate in the Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR) program.

At first glance, the requirements for Pathfinder status do not appear difficult to meet. But in actuality, they are very strict. A cow can only qualify after AHIR records for her first three calves are processed. She must calve within 30 days of the average age of the entire herd at first calving and maintain a calving interval equal to or better than 365 days plus 30 divided by the number of calving intervals. Only calves by registered Angus sires are considered, and each calf must be compared to at least nine other

contemporaries of either or both sexes. A cow is not disqualified from the program by having twins.

Once a cow has qualified for Pathfinder status, the pound sign (#) becomes a permanent fixture preceding her registration number, and she is always a Pathfinder.

### In all shapes and sizes

One will observe many different ranges of expected progeny differences (EPDs) in Pathfinder cows. Should you inspect them visually, you would find a variety of sizes, shapes, muscle patterns, and degrees of condition and femininity. So what does this tell us? The answer is simple ... we can't tell very much about productivity by looking at an Angus female.

This brings me to another factor that has to do with herd, breed and industry improvement. As is the case of productivity, neither can we physically assess these herd matrons for compositional traits.

We have entered a new era of evaluating the traits that affect consumer acceptance of beef and beef products. The first step, which was taken more than a quarter century ago, was structured sire evaluation. Ultrasound technology was the second step, and it was a gigantic one at that. We now have the ability to characterize the female population of both the registered and commercial industries for traits that affect end product merit. In recent years, we have clearly defined the meaning of consumer acceptance, and we now have at our disposal the tools we need to effect this directional change.

The third step will be to discover genes and markers that can be incorporated into our genetic evaluation process that improve the accuracy of prediction for these traits, not only in yearling bulls, but in replacement females as well.

In the next 10 years, we will see the face of our industry change tremendously, and I think that change will certainly be for the better. Join me this month in saluting the Angus females that will serve as our solid foundation in these times of change.

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**REGIONAL MANAGERS**—Refer to page 128.

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For a CAB staff listing, refer to page 142.