



Up Front

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

What influences bull-buying decisions?

Each year about this time, the calving season is well underway across the majority of the nation. Likewise, bull sales are in full force, and commercial producers are continually faced with those all-important bull-buying decisions. Those of us who are engaged in breed association work are on a constant quest to find out just what influences that commercial cowman to purchase the bulls he uses in his program.

Not exactly simple

Bull buying is a far more complicated matter than it used to be. Many of us who are approaching middle age remember the day when the only criterion was to buy a bull that was “of ideal confirmation, had good bone and was completely unrelated to the old bull.” My goodness, how things have changed.

Commercial cattlemen have come to realize that the most rapid way to affect directional change in a cow herd is through the bull used. It is also important to understand that decisions made in spring 2004 will not materialize until fall 2005 or even spring or fall 2006 should ownership of the bull’s progeny be retained through the feedyard.

It is, therefore, important to apply selection criteria that are basic to profitability and avert criteria that are influenced by short-term market fluctuations.

I was greatly intrigued by a recent analysis of factors affecting the sale of beef feeder

cattle sold through Superior Video Auctions from January to August 2001, from January to September 2002, and from January to October 2003. The summary listed the differences in prices received between steers and heifers, as well as among different regions of the country.

From the perspective of the author, the most interesting breakdown involved differences in average sale price per 100 pounds (lb.) of body weight between different breed descriptions.

The summary stated:

“In the 2001 auctions, primarily Angus calves fetched a \$4.60/cwt. (hundredweight) premium over the eared cattle, \$2.86/cwt. over other English and English-cross calves, and \$.65/cwt. over those unknown blacks. English-Continental crosses were \$2.10 back that year, but fell behind all English-source calves in subsequent years. Meanwhile, the Angus advantage over merely black calves increased to \$1.22/cwt. and \$.72/cwt. in 2002 and 2003.”

There’s an advantage

The “Angus advantage” does prevail, and it prevails for various reasons. As I have proclaimed on many occasions, in order for a breed of cattle to be attractive to commercial producers, it must be proficient in reproductive efficiency, maternal ability, growth-to-harvest factors and consumer acceptance. While the Angus breed is proficient in these regards, it is so because of programs adopted by our forefathers to allow breeders to select seedstock for these traits and document the results. The key word is “documentation.”

There’s no doubt that in the near future we’ll all see sweeping changes with respect to the way cattle are identified and documented in regards to their genetics and management. The perfect way for Angus breeders to ensure the documentation of the good genetics they produce is through providing properly transferred performance registration certificates (PRCs) to their commercial customers. The commercial producer is then automatically qualified to participate in AngusSource. As demonstrated in the previous example, documentation will pay dividends.

Suffice it to say, there are many factors that affect bull-buying decisions. As I browse through various publications and read advertisements extolling the virtues of other breeds and multiple-breed crosses, I remember vividly one profound statement made by a commercial cattleman when asked what influenced his bull-buying decisions. His qualified reply was, “It didn’t take me long to read the writin’ on the wall . . . Angus calves do bring more money at the sale barn.”

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