

BY THE NUMBERS

by Esther McCabe, director of performance programs

A Look at Longevity

Increasing the productive life of Angus females.

It may seem like a long time coming, and while we are not there just yet, Angus members are getting closer to having a selection tool available to predict which females will survive and remain productive in the herd longer.

How have we gotten to this point? How much longer before it is available? How will it be released? All of these are good questions and are answered in more detail below.

A decade ago, MaternalPlus®, the whole-herd data reporting option in Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR®), was launched. While AHIR has been in place since 1958, this program was historically built on

a per-calf basis, meaning not every female was required to have a record reported each year.

The challenge with this way of reporting is it can leave holes in female production and disposal records, which creates an even larger challenge when it comes to working on creating tools for maternal traits such as longevity. MaternalPlus was among the first steps in the direction of creating this foundation. This reporting option requires a record for each cow every year, which includes recording whether they had a calf, were open or left the herd.

In 2019 the American Angus Association and Angus Genetics Inc.

(AGI) executed a producers survey as part of the dollar value index (\$Value) remodel project. Most respondents were seedstock breeders, followed by commercial cow-calf producers, while just a few responses were gathered from the stocker and feeder segment of the industry. Of

the 2,033 responses, cow survival was ranked at the top of trait importance. Also important to respondents was including fertility and functionality into a maternal index.

Determining the tools

Based on the survey results, staff dug deeper into how to create tools important to members and their customers. The ability to create those tools relies heavily upon the resources of data available, and the Association relies on the data submitted through AHIR. Again, having the right data to use as the foundation for a tool like longevity starts with complete production and disposal records on females.

Taking into consideration results from the survey and how to facilitate more complete records on females, in 2020 the Association expanded the AHIR reporting option on a per-cow basis. This is known today as the Inventory Reporting program, which includes MaternalPlus as “Level 2” of the program.

The basis of Inventory Reporting is to keep a record of what happened to each female in the herd each year. Did she have a calf? Was she used as a donor? Was she sold and transferred to another herd? Did she leave the herd, and if so, when and why? These records provide the information



required to build the foundation of a tool for longevity. That is not to say the records from females not enrolled in Inventory Reporting cannot be used, but the complete records help to remove “noise” from the data to build a better tool.

Keeping along the same thought of how to build better tools in the future, the list of disposal codes was expanded in 2021 to allow members to provide more detailed reasons for why animals are leaving the herd, whether culled or died. Using the appropriate disposal codes and providing accurate dates for when cattle leave the herd is critical as that information is used in longevity.


While it may seem like a long time coming and there is still more work to be completed, a research longevity expected progeny difference (EPD) is anticipated to be released later in 2022. EPDs are often released into a research environment first for a couple of reasons. It allows members time to understand the EPD, ask questions and provide feedback.

A research EPD is not updated on a weekly basis like production EPDs, but instead updated periodically as more records for that trait are submitted to the Association. When a research EPD is released, a list of artificial insemination (AI) sires is provided that meet a certain threshold for accuracy on the given trait. In addition, members who have provided records for those traits are also provided research EPDs on the animals in their herd.

The foundation for longevity was laid by those involved in Inventory Reporting. When the research longevity EPD is released, those participating in Inventory Reporting (including MaternalPlus) will receive research EPDs on the registered animals in their herd.

If you are not currently in the AHIR Inventory Reporting option, you can still enroll your herd during upcoming enrollment periods to receive the research longevity EPD on registered animals in your herd.

The next enrollment period opens May 1 and closes July 15, and this is best suited for primarily fall-calving

herds. If you are a primarily spring-calving herd and want to participate, that enrollment period opens Nov. 1, 2022, and closes Jan. 15, 2023. 

Editor's note: If you have questions or want to learn more, contact the Association at 816-383-5100 or email angus@angus.org.



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Sale will contain daughters of
Champion Hill Georgina 8547, the two-time
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CONTACT:
Mat Toler (740) 709-1388 • **Nick Craft** (740) 645-9291