



**Demand for bulls:
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It is here today.**

Beef Industry Needs Angus Assurance

Although the cattle business has enjoyed a refreshing and debt-lightening period of profitable prices, the unfortunate fact remains that demand for beef has grown very little. To obtain profitable prices we had to reduce supply. Obviously the industry cannot survive a long-term dose of this medicine.

To boost demand and keep prices profitable we need two things. First, is a ready supply of consistent, high quality beef. Second, is better beef marketing, packaging and consumer information. With the exception of our checkoff program, accomplishing this second goal is out of our hands. We must depend upon others in the beef industry, with our strong encouragement, to improve consumer marketing and information programs.

When it comes to quality and consistent, however, we have a major portion of the responsibility. That is particularly true since prices paid by feedlots and even packers don't include the needed incentives to bring about genetic change. What's more, it appears that Angus is about the only breed in the United States able to furnish commercial cattle producers with the seedstock that will produce a consistent, high quality beef carcass.

True, some breeds have recently initiated carcass evaluation programs. But we in the Angus business know how long it takes to build a carcass expected progeny differences (EPD) database. Of all the bulls in the United States with EPDs for carcass merit, not very many are a breed other than Angus. And in most cases the breeds that are only beginning to evaluate for carcass merit are not known for producing well marbled, high quality beef. They have a long, difficult road ahead of them with no assurance they have the genetics to reach their intended goal.

The Angus breed is another matter. We have breeders who are deadly serious about carcass quality today. They are building on our breed's reputation for carcass quality by rapidly increasing the number of bulls that have been evaluated for carcass merit. The list of bulls with positive marbling EPDs is growing fast, and is becoming more useful every day.

Even breeders who are not in a position to test bulls take carcass EPDs and put them to

good use. An increasing number of registered Angus breeders stack positive EPD pedigrees in their herds. Not only do they market cattle sired by bulls with positive carcass EPDs, they sell cattle out of cows with generations of positive carcass genetics bred into them.

Demand for bulls with positive carcass EPDs is not some phenomena we will see "down the road" or "in a few years." It is here today I talked with several commercial cattle producers recently who are concerned about improving the marbling ability of the cattle they produce. John Crouch talks regularly with commercial cattle producers who seek information about this subject. The major AI studs are also keeping a sharp eye out for carcass bulls as they see their demand—both from registered and commercial producers—

increase. But we are not back into a single-trait selection mode. Producers today want an optimum range of all traits measured by EPDs. They are not willing to sacrifice calving ease, or milk, or weaning weight, or yearling weight. And they shouldn't. If our industry is to provide a uniform, high quality product with the eating consistency that consumers demand, then we need to keep a handle on all these traits, and use them to optimize production.

This is not easy. In the old days it was fairly simple to increase size and growth, which seemed to be all that the commercial industry and the feedlot operators were really demanding. It is quite another thing to breed cattle that measure up in all the necessary traits. But then that has long been the situation faced by serious livestock breeders.

We are fortunate. In the Angus business we have the cattle, the genetics, the database, and even the consumer marketing programs that will allow us to do all these things. And we have the breeders with the skill to put it all together. It not only is the responsible thing to do; in the end it will also prove to be the most profitable for our breed and for individual Angus breeders.

