

Addressing Derivative Questions

by **John Crouch**, executive vice president, American Angus Association

The dialogue that follows is a response to questions (presented in bold text) generated during a conference call of the Montana Angus Association Board of Directors. These “cons,” along with some “pros,” were summarized and submitted by John Patterson, president of the Montana Angus Association, and published in the March 2002 issue of the *Montana Angus News*. The questions are in regard to the American Angus Association establishing a program to process performance and ancestral records for Angus-derivative cattle. As always, the American Angus Association’s officers, directors and staff welcome your thoughts and concerns on this issue.

The American Angus Association was designed to protect the genetic purity and guard the integrity of the breed.

Not only is this a true statement, but it’s also one of the primary principles our founders built this organization upon. The adoption of a program to document the ancestry and performance of Angus hybrid cattle will in no way impair the ability of the American Angus Association to maintain the purity of the breed. In fact, it could help to differentiate the Angus breed from other black, polled breeds. At no time will Angus hybrid cattle be enrolled in the herd book.

As the beef industry evolves, so must a progressive breed association. Although programs like Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR) and Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) were not included in the original charge by the founders of the American Angus Association, they have become the lifeblood of our organization.

Is this idea driven primarily by [Association] staff to increase revenue?

Rather than being staff-driven, this is an industry-driven issue.

At the current time, the financial well-being of the American Angus Association is excellent. Association revenue is derived from the following sources: registration fees, transfer fees, processing performance data, artificial insemination (AI) service certificates, membership dues, fees from affiliates, miscellaneous fees and interest income.

The adoption of new programs over the past decade has been made possible due to increased activity in the aforementioned areas. Should activity remain flat or decrease, programs would need to be dropped, personnel eliminated or new sources of revenue explored. These are the simple economics and realities of operating a business.

Among the core goals of this program is to increase revenue for those raising registered Angus cattle and for customers using Angus genetics. The program certainly could also provide an additional source of revenue to the Association.

Would our present EPD (expected progeny difference) system be scrapped in order to have across-breed comparison?

On the contrary, our current genetic evaluation system would be enhanced, enabling us to directly compare Angus cattle to purebred animals of other breeds. In effect, the accuracy of prediction would be improved.

If we give composite cattle numbers, can registration papers be far behind?

The question is not “if” composite or hybrid cattle will be given “numbers.” It is already happening. Estimates are that the numbers of hybrid seedstock used in the beef industry will increase substantially during the next decade. Registration papers or ancestral documentation is currently being provided on hybrid cattle by at least three other breed organizations, and that number will increase. The great common denominator in most of this documentation is Angus genetics.

Data have become the currency of today’s beef industry. Ancestral documents can, will and are being generated by personal computers, with or without our consent. Therefore, the question remains, “Should we be content letting others use our data on Angus hybrids to compete in the marketplace, or should we use it ourselves?”

Would [the multibreed analysis] legitimize composite seedstock programs and enhance their marketability with our data?

Legitimize is not the proper word in this context, as it implies that hybrid cattle are illegitimate or illegal. The fact is that our industry, from the standpoint of end product, is primarily made up of crossbred cattle. Hybrid vigor and its benefits cannot be denied or ignored. Furthermore, hybrid cattle are being used in the industry as parents.

If we are to improve the quality and consistency of beef and beef products, the seedstock that create the product, either purebred or crossbred, should be genetically characterized. And when you consider that Angus genetics account for nearly 60% of

past and present bull purchases for commercial producers, you see that what is good for the beef industry should be good for the Angus industry.

Would additional staff and [a larger] physical plant be necessary to handle the increased workload [generated by such a program]?

If a structure is adopted by the American Angus Association’s Board of Directors and membership, minimal additions to staff will likely be required. Our physical plant is certainly adequate.

Will there be separate databases for Angus and Angus-cross cattle? Can we truly compare apples to oranges?

Rest assured, the Angus database would not be compromised. However, direct comparisons between Angus and purebred cattle of other breeds, as well as reciprocal F₁ crosses, will provide the necessary data for more accurate across-breed comparisons.

As this data is compared on a level playing field, many believe that the Angus breed will shine even brighter in all traits, from birth and performance to carcass quality. Until this fair comparison can be made, public opinion will continue to stereotype Angus cattle as being inferior to Continental cattle in the areas of performance and red meat yield.

Can composite EPDs have any breeding accuracy, given the genetic variation involved?

Contrary to popular opinion, the genetic variation in composite or hybrid cattle is no greater than the variation in most pure lines. An extensive data analysis will be completed by our talented and experienced team of genetic advisors to formulate factors that adjust for heterosis and breed complementarity.

Will the American Angus Association require one of the parents to be a registered Angus animal in order to process the data?

Neither guidelines nor a structure for this concept has been recommended. It is generally felt that a program such as this should require at least one parent to be a registered Angus. In addition, in response to concerns by various members, the other parent will likely require a registration paper and genetic predictions (EPDs) from another recognized breed association.