

by Mark McCully
CEO, American Angus Association



Silver linings

Back in my February column, I talked about industry disruption.

I wrote that article in late December, and I discussed technology and innovation that would likely change the way we do the cattle business in the future. Not even in my wildest dreams would I have imagined that just a short four months later, we would be facing a disease pandemic that would turn this world upside down.

The COVID-19 pandemic was a “disruptor” of a scale and velocity like none other in modern times. Seemingly overnight supply chains for food, cleaning materials and medical equipment were stripped clean, businesses and schools were closed, and families went into quarantine. Our world changed in unimaginable ways, and new phrases emerged into our vocabulary like “social distancing” and “flatten the curve.” While significant debate exists around cause, government response and media coverage, no one can dispute that COVID-19 changed the world in ways we would not have imagined just a few months earlier.

Totally unsurprising through the chaos, however, was the response of the agriculture community. Farmers and ranchers met the challenge with resilience, toughness and tenacity. Cows continued to calve, feed continued to be hauled and this nation was reminded just how precious their food supply truly is.

Disruption to innovation

Around the office we’ve been talking a lot about “silver linings.” Our team was challenged to figure out how to take our processes and membership services remote — in just a few days. The old adage, “Necessity is the mother of invention,” was on full display. The team was creative, innovative and flexible. In the end we discovered many new and more efficient ways of doing things that will benefit the organization for years to come. I suspect it might be the same for you and your operation.


I’ve watched seedstock producers with bull sales use digital marketing to notify customers of changes in dates or location. They modified how customers were able to view the bulls and augmented their live auction with online bidding. Even without the same number of buyers in the bleachers, demand has continued to be strong and technology allowed for many sales to post results as good or better than previous years.

Bare meatcases created an opportunity for some producers to elevate their direct-to-consumer beef sales. Our *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) partners in foodservice and retail found new ways to meet the challenges. The brand team collaborated with foodservice distributors to shift product to grocery stores experiencing shortages.

Restaurateurs reinvented their businesses, transitioning fine dining to in-home luxury meals, chefs offering “pay it forward” sponsored dinners for first responders, and transformations from foodservice to retail butcher shops.

And I’ve loved hearing the stories of families coming together more closely through the crisis. Without the distraction of busy calendars and the many scheduled events and activities, kids are rediscovering the farm or ranch. Young professionals have moved back home to work from their parents’ dining room tables, all while helping accomplish some long-needed projects in the evenings.

I don’t know what silver linings you all found, but I bet they’re plentiful. If you haven’t found many, I’d challenge you to just look a little harder.

No doubt, by the time you read this column the situation could have changed even more. But I’m confident in one thing: The American agriculture industry will rise to meet the needs of our consumers. What you do, day in and day out, matters. And if the world realizes that more than they did a few weeks ago, that’s definitely a silver lining. 

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark A. McCully". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

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