

Reputation Verified

Genetic Merit Scorecard proves high scores, high-quality feeder cattle and higher premiums.

by Whitney Whitaker, American Angus Association

In the Angus business, breeders expect high-quality data to represent their cattle in the marketplace. For commercial producers, AngusLinkSM Genetic Merit Scorecard[®] (GMS) can do the same. A recent analysis from the American Angus Association validates GMS numbers.

“Where seedstock producers use expected progeny differences (EPDs) to make decisions, the GMS does an equally good job of describing genetic merit in feeder cattle,” says Troy Marshall, director of commercial industry relations for the Association.

The scorecard conveys the genetic merit of a set of feeder cattle using the breeding history of a herd. The scorecard includes three values: Beef Score, Feedlot Score and Grid Score. The scoring system ranges from 0 to 200, with 100 representing the industry average. Each score is built from a different set of expected progeny differences (EPDs) and dollar value indexes. Beef Score comprises EPDs including carcass weight, marbling and feed efficiency. The Feedlot Score considers average daily gain (ADG) and dry matter intake (DMI) EPDs. The Grid Score measures potential for carcass grid merit, referencing marbling, fat and ribeye EPDs.

The AngusLink team at the Association used data from 115,000 head of cattle to prove the scorecard’s credibility and how higher scores equaled higher quality cattle, ultimately granting higher premiums.

Fig. 1: % CAB and % CAB or higher based on GMS grid score

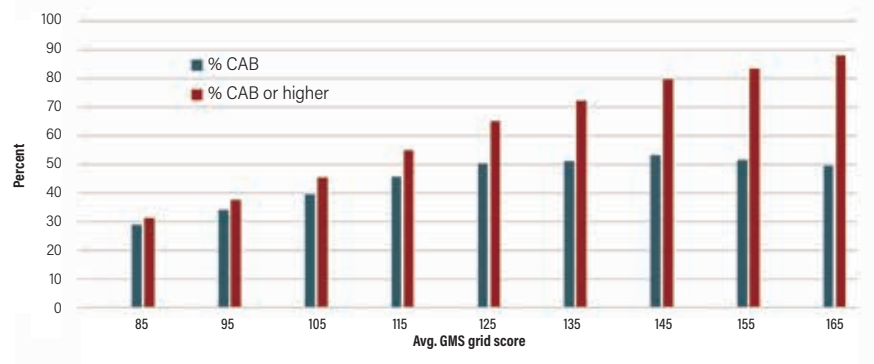


Fig. 2: Actual REA and marbling by GMS grid score

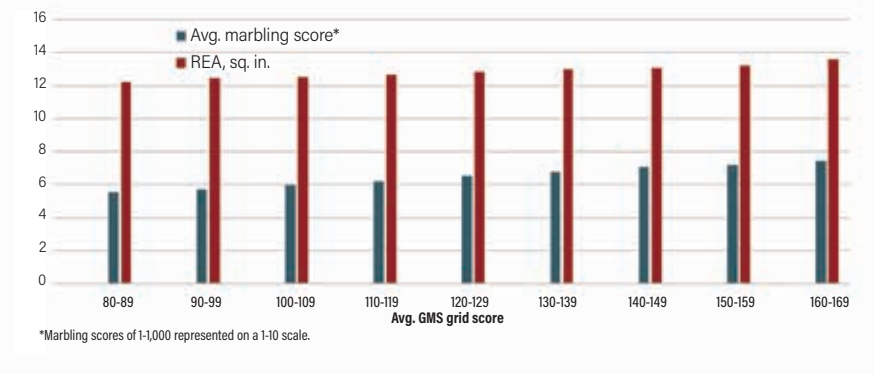
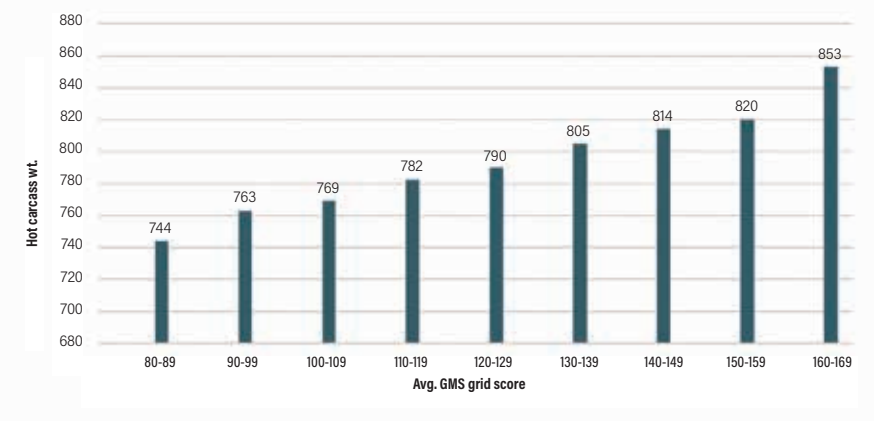


Fig. 3: Average carcass weight by GMS grid score



GMS values were calculated retrospectively and then compared to lot-level, carcass data. What they found confirmed the scores were accurately telling the story. On the top end, cattle with an average Grid Score of 165 resulted in 38% Prime, 88% qualifying for *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) or higher, and only 1% Select. Compare those numbers to the low-performing cattle and results were drastically different. Those with an average Grid Score of 85 made 21% Select, 31% CAB and higher, while only 2.38% met Prime qualifications.

“Feeders haven’t been able to feed cattle with scores of 100 versus 165 and compare results,” Marshall says. “We wanted to prove the difference in scores so feeders can know how much more value there is in higher-scoring cattle.”

Evaluating the data on a graph shows the trends between high and low performers were linear. Improvements in Grid Score correlated to improvements in final carcass quality (see Fig. 1). It was the same case for ribeye area, which increased from 12.23 square inches (sq. in.) to 13.6 sq. in. with the highest GMS score (see Fig. 2). Hot carcass weight also increased from 744 pounds (lb.) for low performers to 853 lb. for top GMS values (see Fig. 3).

“We have proven it works and will perform in the real world. Now we can incorporate genetic merit into the pricing equation in a reliable and objective manner,” Marshall says.

Local options


The feeder calf market is responding. To determine the difference in scores and prices, the team reviewed records on 21,800 head with similar process-verified program (PVP) claims that sold in 2021 summer video sales. Dividing

them into two groups, the top 50% of GMS beef scores averaged 148 and earned \$8.52 per hundredweight (cwt.) more than the bottom half. Today, there’s a \$7.13 premium for cattle with the scorecard, regardless of what the numbers are, but Marshall says he expects buyers to become more discerning over time.

Along with cattle sold through video auctions, success for AngusLink cattle with the GMS has grown on a local level. Angus producer Jim Brinkley worked with his customers to host a special AngusLink feeder calf sale at the Green City Livestock sale barn in Missouri. Approximately 400 calves sold in that portion of the sale with a wide range of lot sizes and weight classes. The market was exceptionally impressive as AngusLink steer calves averaged a premium of \$5.53 per cwt.

and heifer calves brought a premium of \$13.71 per cwt.

Brinkley shared how he was very pleased with how well the cattle sold. He thought the AngusLink cattle had great uptake and paid the producers very well. He also shared how there can be benefits to local sale barns for smaller producers.

“Just because some producers may have 20, 30 or 70 head of feeder calves, doesn’t mean the genetics aren’t as good as people with 300, 500 or 800 head,” Brinkley says. “AngusLink highlights the genetic choice of the producers, and it rewards them for their commitment to buying superior Angus bulls.” 

Angus breeders use AngusLink as a customer service tool

Building customer relationships can be a vital part of a business’s longevity. In a *Forbes* article about customer service, 96% of customers said customer service is important in their choice of loyalty to a brand. Why should that be any different in their seedstock purchases?

Missouri Angus breeder Jim Brinkley says helping customers achieve a premium for their calves is a great customer service tool.

“As a seedstock producer, the more we can get involved and work with our customers and show them the difference between black bulls and registered Angus bulls, I think we can enhance our program along with theirs,” Brinkley adds.

In addition, Marshall says using the GMS can help commercial cattlemen evaluate strengths and weaknesses in their bull battery. Seedstock providers can then take those and help direct their customers based on holes they may have.

“The numbers provide an objective measure,” Marshall says.

Breeders can sit down with bull buyers and help them evaluate their goals compared to their bull battery. Done over a period of time, commercial bull buyers can see the progress they are making by comparing scores from year to year.

With AngusLink GMS, producers can see a genetic representation of the calves they are selling. The scorecard will also provide data that proves quality bulls improve the genetic merit of their offspring, Marshall says. This encourages repeat customers who are happy to know the bulls they are buying will help them make progress toward their goals.

“The GMS can be a significant tool that will come full circle, if breeders let it,” Marshall says. “Angus breeders can provide their customers with the genetics they need to succeed, which builds more trust and confidence in their seedstock provider.”