

from the office

LEAD IN

by Dr. C.K. Allen
Executive Vice President
American Angus Assn.

Times of crises and difficulty provide the opportunity for people to show their substance. They provide an opportunity to excel in spite of adverse circumstances and the opportunity for people to display their real value, their integrity and their "true grit."

Some breeders pass the test of adversity and really benefit in the long run. These are the breeders who, when the chips are down, put extra emphasis on integrity and honesty. Unfortunately, many breeders fail in difficult times by trying to cover their problems, deceive their customers and avoid the simple honesty that would endear customers to them forever.

One opportunity for breeders to exhibit their principles and values is their response to a situation such as the discovery of a genetic defect in their herd. All cattle have genetic defects, although we tend to put more emphasis on single genetic defects than we do on multi-gene defects such as poor size, infertility or inadequate milk production. The purpose of this editorial is not to discuss genetic defects and their ramifications but to discuss how people, especially breeders, react to adversity.

Opportunity for Evaluation

Genetic defects represent one crisis that provides an opportunity to evaluate the way a breeder or breed association reacts. There is a tremendous variation in the way breed associations handle genetic defects. The Angus association and most dairy associa-



tions have open disclosure rules and try to keep all breeders informed. Many breed associations work behind the scene with breeders to clear up individual problems but keep them quiet. There is little attempt to try to inform other breeders of any potential breeding problems they may encounter. And then there are some breed associations that don't even help breeders

control genetic defects. These associations limit their involvement to denying that there are any problems within their breed, even though many genetic problems can be easily documented.

The greatest tragedy of all occurs when breeders or associations try to keep others in the dark and then unload their problems on someone who is uninformed. This is a true tragedy, because a breeder must bury a little of himself, a little pride, a little integrity, with each cover-up until all that is left is a shell of a cattle breeder who doesn't even realize the transition he has undergone.

Great Issue

The issue of integrity or honesty is much greater than the short-term gains or long-term losses of one unethical person or the unfortunate losses of innocent victims. The purebred industry is based on the credibility of the ancestry, birth and performance records of the animals we raise. A 1,000-lb. cow is worth \$475-\$525 as a commercial animal. Any value above the commercial price is based on the credibility of her records and the integrity of the breeder.

One reason why some breeders have always had good demand for their cattle is that people believe them and their records. Many potential buyers of cattle first evaluate the breeder before they attempt to evaluate his cattle. Breeders who can establish a reputation for honesty and frankness will continue to sell their cattle for a premium. 