

from the office

LEAD IN

By Richard Spader, Executive Vice President, American Angus Association



The topic that has captured the imagination and interest of the beef industry in 1985 is "optimums."

The press, educators, and even cattle producers, are looking to more practical solutions to their current production problems. This new and positive trend could put an end to the industry's long-term search for maximum expression of a single economically important trait as the ultimate measure of profitable beef production.

The dialogue is not new to the American Angus Assn. Research has shown for years now that maximum profit is not obtained from maximizing performance in a single trait. Mature size is the most obvious example.

It was in the early 1970s that Ohio State University concluded that Angus were more efficient producers of beef than one or two large Continental breeds. Later, the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center showed the tremendous advantage Angus cattle have in calving ease, rebreeding performance and percent of live calves weaned. All are important factors in an efficient beef cattle operation. We repeated these facts time and again in Angus promotion and advertising over the years.

More recently, MARC released results of a study which showed that

black-baldy cows were up to 30 percent more efficient in maintenance requirements than some exotic crosses. And, maintenance accounts for from 70 to 75 percent of the total annual energy requirements of a cow. This fact was emphasized immediately by the Association in advertising and will be the main theme of the "big cows" elephant ad that will run in the 1986 fiscal year. The research is particularly significant since it shows that there are differences in efficiency, not only between large and moderate-size cattle but between breeds, as well.

In fact, the elephant ads this past year have hammered home the importance of optimums and the fallacy of maximums, while stressing the need to match breeds and types of cattle to specific environments. This has been made easier by the fact that unbiased research supports our position that Angus do indeed fit into almost every program of profitable, efficient beef cattle production.

A good example is research from Texas A&M University reported recently in the Farm & Ranch newspaper. The article quoted Dr. L.R. Sprott, Texas A&M, as saying that medium-weight cows weighing from 1,000 to 1,200 lb. outperformed both the smaller cows that weighed under 1,000 lb. and the larger cows that weighed from 1,201 to 1,700 lb. Although the large cows weaned the heaviest calves (average weight 552 lb. compared to 539 lb. for the medium) the large cows required 18 percent more energy and 13 percent more protein daily. As a result, the extra 13 lb. of calf the large cows weaned was offset by their much higher maintenance requirements.

This is an excellent example of optimum production for maximum profit. It shows dramatically that at some point added input, (in this case cow size) though it yields heavier weaned calves, actually can decrease profits.

Selecting for optimums does not mean that cattlemen should not continue to select for efficient growth rate

and other traits that put money in their pocket. It means simply that cattlemen must concentrate more on maximum net return within the parameters of their farm or ranch. And this will require a delicate balance of many factors that affect profit, at the expense of old-fashioned "one trait" selection.

A recent story in Farm Journal Beef Extra on the Jack and Harris Penner Ranch near Mill Creek, Okla., told how they have developed their 400-cow commercial herd into a high-performing operation. They use careful culling and artificial insemination. The Penners also told how they actually decreased the mothering ability of their cows several years ago by selecting only the largest, growthiest bulls in the Angus breed. They reversed this trend by using the National Sire Evaluation program results to find bulls that were high in maternal traits, as well as growth. Maternal traits are far more important in the long run than early growth, Harris Penner has concluded.

The trend would appear to be a positive force for the entire industry and particularly for the Association and its members. The Angus breed today fulfills more of the needs of the commercial industry than any other breed. Indeed, as the Penners prove, Angus is one breed that can stand on its own in today's commercial industry and compete as a straight breed in production and profits with the best crossbred operations.

What's more, American Angus Assn. programs, such as AHIR and National Sire Evaluation, are helping produce and identify even more genetically superior seed stock that excel in the various traits of reproduction, production and end product. And, finally, we have a Certified Angus Beef program that is helping merchandise our commercial production.

I look forward with anticipation to watching the breed grow and take over an even larger share of the beef market in the years ahead.

AJ