

Lead In

by Richard Spader, executive vice president



Quality audit pinpoints improvements, challenges

The National Beef Quality Audit (NBQA) released at the Cattle Industry Annual Convention and Trade Show in San Antonio, Texas, this year revealed some interesting information that speaks well for Angus. The same report re-emphasized the challenges to the breed and to the beef industry as we strive to build market share for our end product.

In a nutshell, the NBQA says beef cattle producers have responded and have improved our end product compared to earlier audits in the 1990s. The improvement came during a time when Angus bull demand has been at its height and when Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) has had double-digit growth for years. I would like to think the movement to more Angus genetics in the national cow herd has contributed to this improvement.

Over the past decade, the beef industry has taken a closer look at itself and realized that it has ignored some of the things that long have made it great — namely quality, consistency and consumer satisfaction. There has been more positive discussion the past few years about the need to produce cattle that yield carcasses of the correct size and lean-meat yield with sufficient marbling than in the last 15 years. In this respect, the American Angus Association is no longer a lone voice crying out in the wilderness.

If the industry does indeed pay close attention to eating quality and consumer satisfaction, I am convinced that it will build the kind of beef industry that will expand the demand for beef, particularly *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) product. Improved demand for Angus will strengthen your Association and enable it to fulfill its long-range plans and goals.

The NBQA, by characterizing our product at different time intervals, indicates

the beef industry has made positive strides. The 2000 audit reveals several positive trends.

First, there are more USDA Choice and Prime carcasses. The percentage of Choice and Prime carcasses climbed from 48% in 1995 to 51% of the total fed-cattle supply in 2000. The percentage of Prime carcasses rose from 1.3% to 2%.

Second, fewer B-maturity carcasses are available. B maturity represents finished cattle 30 months of age or older, and that percentage dropped from 4.3% in 1995 to 2.5% in 2000.

Next, there was no major change in excess fat production. While carcass fat thickness is slightly higher than it was in 1995, it still remains well below 1991 when it was a primary quality concern.

The report also indicates a substantial improvement in the absence of horns. The percentage of cattle without horns improved from 68% in 1995 to 77% in 2000. Cattle with horns cause bruising during transport and handling. As an industry, we know the simplest way to eliminate horns is to use an Angus bull.

Finally, there have been substantial improvements in the incidence of injection-site lesions — from 22% to 3%. The beef industry needs to be commended for its aggressive effort in the past decades to improve this area of concern, but the job is far from complete. And that applies to both registered cattle producers and commercial cattlemen.

The audit also identified challenges.

Among them was a level of uniformity and consistency, including inappropriate carcass size and weight. Another concern was inadequate tenderness despite the headway that has been made in this area.

The industry still needs more marbling in carcasses, according to the audit. While there are more Choice and Prime carcasses, there

remains a great need for well-marbled beef.

The issue of excessive fat cover still plagues our industry. Producers should continue to seek genetics and production practices that result in desirable quality grade while diminishing fat cover. This is a specific challenge for the Angus business, and the tools you're offered through the National Cattle Evaluation (NCE) give you the best avenues to improve your Angus genetics.

The audit also called for elimination of all Standard-grade carcasses, a reduction of hide damage from brands, less bruising of cattle from horns, and health practices that offer improved carcasses.

As chairman of the 2000 NBQA, Bob Kerschen summarized, "The beef industry should be pleased with our progress, but the commitment to quality is something that never ends. There's still a need to deliver higher-quality products in the future."

That commitment to quality is first and foremost with the American Angus Association. The genetics that you as seedstock producers supply to the commercial industry are the genetics that supply a meal in the future. It's a big responsibility and one I know you don't take lightly.

I am optimistic about the future of our Association and the Angus breed in meeting the demands of the beef industry. One never knows what roadblocks might be thrown our way, but barring unpredictable calamity, I think Angus cattle profitably will fulfill the needs of our changing beef industry.

Thanks to the groundwork that has been done, Angus have a better opportunity than our competition to provide a better way of life for thousands of families and individuals who rely upon the cattle business for all or part of their livelihood. And the bottom line is that we please our consumers.

Richard J. Spader

NBQA 2000
A commitment to never-ending improvement