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As every cattleman in America surely knows by now, significant changes are taking place in the beef industry. It is becoming more competitive, with greater emphasis on traits of economic importance for all concerned.

And breeds throughout this decade will be faced with even greater challenges as we address competition, not only from other breeds but also from other sources of protein.

The Angus breed isn't immune from these trends or from the challenges they present. Plainly speaking, it will be a challenge for all in the beef industry in the decade ahead.

It's for these reasons the American Angus Association sponsors national conferences and strives to bring the latest in research, technology, marketing ideas and plain old management to its members. This year's National Angus Conference was held in Austin, Texas, May 20-21.

The theme for this year's conference — "Investing in Excellence" — set the stage for a lineup of speakers and moderators who zeroed in on nearly all aspects of the commercial and registered cattle industry. Most importantly, when the conference was complete, a common thread tied many of the presentations regarding the role of the Angus breed in beef production in the '90s.

A number of speakers emphasized the importance of the Angus breed as a maternal breed and encouraged seedstock producers to never lose sight of that advantage. There's no doubt a number of breeds promote their maternal advantages, but the growing number of commercial Angus and Angus crossbred cow herds speaks for itself. Reproduction is still No. 1 in cattle production; no breed matches the Angus advantage in this area.

A second advantage was milk— whatever level of milk production best fits your needs and, more importantly, the needs of your customers. The Angus breed prides itself in having the tools to measure this important trait, and seedstock producers have given it special attention for decades. Next to reproduction, conference attendees were told producers want live calves that grow, and milk is an important component in a calf expressing its true growth potential. That, coupled with the growth available in Angus cattle, offers a unique advantage to the Angus breed in commercial beef production.

The importance of marbling in Angus was brought out time and again. The production of taste fat— not waste fat— is an inherent ability of our breed, and marbling has positioned the Angus breed as the No. 1 choice of feeders and packers. With carcass EPDs available in the Angus breed, breeders were challenged to maintain the marbling in Angus cattle while maintaining an emphasis on cattle devoid of excessive fat cover.

The message to cattlemen was clear: The Angus breed has established itself as a dominant force in the beef cattle industry, based on the important traits offered through Angus bulls and females.

That, along with the largest branded beef program in the United States, a large data base of objective measures as a basis for genetic evaluation and programs to promote Angus advantages, has given us the "Angus Edge."

When the conference was over you couldn't help but be excited about the opportunities we have with the Angus breed. All of you in the registered Angus seedstock business have reason to be optimistic for the years ahead.

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