

by Mark McCully
CEO, American Angus Association



Pride in the past, faith in the future

June 10, 2019, will be a day I'll vividly remember the rest of my life. As I walked in the front doors of 3201 Frederick Avenue, the gravity of what I had signed on to do was staggering.

Through my 19 years with Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB), I spent many days in the American Angus Association office. I always appreciated the archives on the wall and the pictures of past Angus leaders. But on that day, those same relics had far more meaning. On that day the rich heritage and significant history of this great Association was not lost on me. I was both humbled in the moment and invigorated for the possibilities of the future.

Through my interview process, the Board of Directors asked me what I believed the future held for beef breed associations and what was to be their role in the beef cattle industry of tomorrow. I shared it's obvious that in a rapidly changing world, breed associations, like the members they serve, must adapt to stay relevant. We must distinguish between the "relevance of the breed" and the "relevance of the breed association." These are not the same, and it's vital to acknowledge the difference.

Multiple breed associations may have similar charters and bylaws, yet I suspect only a few will be relevant to the future of the cattle industry. That relevancy will be determined by several things — first being the strength and value of the breed itself. No amount of marketing and promotion can overcome cattle that don't work. Second, the foresight and progressiveness of the members and

breeders. And third, the resources at its disposal — data, people and finances. Those resources must be directed to deliver programs and services that ultimately create real value for its members and the greater beef industry.

A vital role

Breed associations can maintain their role in delivering genetic information to a progressive industry, as they are best positioned to collect, compile and deliver this information. However, that position is not a given. Others will fill this important role if breed associations don't keep up. Breed associations must continue to provide the best selection tools with a focus on what's important to the commercial cattleman. The registration paper and the data that comes with it must have significant and irreplaceable value to seedstock and commercial sectors.

Associations will have the opportunity to fill many vital roles in the future. There will be an enormous opportunity to be a knowledge hub for seedstock and commercial cattlemen as resources around university extensions become increasingly limited. Developing the next generation of cattlemen through leadership programs will also be fundamental to the business. Our youth shows and activities are a primary on-ramp to our business, and

these programs make sure we have kids excited and optimistic about their futures in production agriculture.

Relevant breed associations of the future will provide marketing opportunities and create demand for their members. They will offer diverse programs to fit members with different operation sizes and priorities. Not only can associations be a voice of industry leadership shaping a prosperous future for its members, but they also play an important role in advocating for agriculture as consumers are increasingly removed from the food production system.

Ultimately, I believe successful, growing and relevant breed associations of the future will strike a balance of progress and innovation with stability and member confidence. They will respect their heritage and recognize time-honored traditions while not resting on their laurels and instead adapting to the changes and realities of the business. They must deliver real value, enabling cattlemen to make really good cattle. As we assess where the American Angus Association is today and how we are positioned for the future, it's hard not to be incredibly optimistic. I know I am. **AJ**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark A. McCully". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

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