

Lead In

by Richard Spader, executive vice president



Selection criteria now include carcass merit

Although the cattle industry has enjoyed a welcome period of improved prices, the fact remains that we still have a lot of work to do in building demand for our end product. To obtain profitable prices, we had to reduce supply. Now we have to build on a solid foundation of genetically improved beef cattle that meet the needs of our most

important customer — the consumer.

When it comes to quality and consistency, there are a number of players involved from start to finish, but breeders of registered Angus cattle have a major portion of the responsibility. It all starts with the genetics produced in the seedstock industry; the rest of the business either benefits or suffers from our decisions.

It appears to me that Angus is one of the few breeds in the United States able to furnish commercial cattle producers with the genetics to produce a consistent, high-quality beef carcass. It's true that some breeds recently have initiated carcass evaluation programs, but we in the Angus business know how long it takes to build a carcass database and the commitment that's needed by seedstock producers to make it a reality.

We have breeders who are deadly serious about carcass quality today. They are building on our breed's reputation for carcass quality by rapidly increasing the number of bulls that have been evaluated for carcass merit. The list of bulls with positive marbling expected progeny differences (EPDs), for example, is growing fast and is becoming a more useful tool every day.

Even breeders who are not in a position to evaluate bulls for carcass EPDs can put them to good use.

An increasing number of registered Angus breeders stack positive quality, cutability and retail product EPDs in their herds. Not only do they market cattle sired by bulls with positive carcass EPDs, they sell progeny of cows with generations of positive carcass genetics bred into them.

Demand for bulls with positive carcass EPDs is not some phenomena we will see sometime in the future. It is here today. I know several progressive commercial cattle producers who are concerned about improving the carcass traits of the cattle they produce. This point was brought out time and again at Angus University, an

educational seminar sponsored by Certified Angus Beef LLC, in Columbia, Mo. Our staff and regional managers talk regularly with commercial cattle producers who seek information on the subject. The major bull studs are also keeping a sharp eye out for carcass bulls as they see their demand — from both registered and commercial producers — increase.

But we are not back into a single-trait-selection mode.

Producers today want an optimum range of all traits measured by EPDs. They are not willing to sacrifice calving ease or milk or growth traits, and they shouldn't. If our industry is to provide a uniform, high-quality product with the eating consistency that consumers demand, we need to keep a handle on all these traits and use them to optimize production.

This isn't always simple. In the old days, it was fairly simple to increase size and growth, which were what most people were demanding. It is quite another thing to breed cattle that measure up in all the necessary traits. But that has long been the situation faced by serious-minded livestock breeders.

Our producers today have accepted the fact that pedigree backed by predictable performance is the currency of the beef cattle industry. Our database of performance records is one of the Angus breed's greatest assets, and our breeder-members are using it to the fullest.

We are fortunate that, in the Angus business, we have the cattle, the genetics, the database and even the consumer-marketing programs that will allow us to do many things for the beef industry. And we have the breeders with the skill to put it all together. Not only is it the responsible thing to do, but in the end, it will prove to be the most profitable for our breed, for individual Angus breeders and for the beef industry.

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