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Genetics: A key in the sustainability puzzle

Sustainability has been a buzz term for many years now. Consumers, policy makers and even the financial institutions that provide capital to run our businesses are asking cattlemen pointed questions about our product.

While we don't love the idea of needing to prove what we do is sustainable, I have a hard time thinking these requests and demands are going to lessen in the future. I expect they'll grow exponentially.

The word "sustainability" likely prompts different reactions from cattlemen. For some, it is seen as a threat — a word hijacked by activist groups attempting to restrict how we do business or eliminate our way of life altogether. For some it is simply another word for stewardship and represents the practice of leaving things better than we found them — an idea ingrained throughout production agriculture.

For others, I suspect the word represents an opportunity. It's a chance to finally get credit for taking care of the land and cattle; supporting rural communities; and providing consumers with safe, nutritious and great-tasting protein.

The past several years, I have been part of more sustainability discussions than I care to count. It is complex for sure, but in these discussions, I find genetics do not take a big enough spotlight. We as an Angus breed have an incredible story to tell, and I am excited to find ways to better get that done.

A key pillar of sustainability is environmental impact. Beyond the ruminant's ability to upcycle cellulose and the importance of grasslands for wildlife and carbon sequestration,

genetic gains in production efficiency made by Angus breeders are certainly something to brag about. Angus producers have successfully selected for increased growth rate, improved feed efficiency and improved fertility. These result in more pounds of beef produced per unit of feed and water resources used. Documenting this progress will be an important element of the sustainability discussion moving forward.

Doing animal welfare well

Genetics play a key role in animal care and welfare, another sustainability pillar. Angus breeders have long selected for calving ease and less dystocia, an obvious animal welfare advantage. Disposition has been a priority of the Angus breed, not to mention the benefits of being naturally polled. Additionally, our work with the PAP (pulmonary arterial pressure) and hair shedding expected progeny differences (EPD) allow for breeders to select cattle that best fit their environment.


Discussions around sustainability also include antimicrobial use. When calves come easy and quickly start nursing a good Angus cow with a nice udder, that all-important colostrum gets consumed.

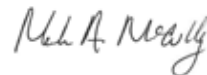
Problems at calving, slow calves or big, hard-to-start teats compromise colostrum intake and set up a calf for more health issues down the road while creating the potential need

for antibiotics. Maybe this is new thinking about genetic progress and sustainability, but I believe this is our chance to reframe the topic.

Sustainability discussions include social responsibility. The Angus family has long invested in our next generation of Angus producers. We drive economic viability in our own operations and those of our customers, and that funnels back to our hometowns.

Food waste is an enormous problem with more than 40% of fruits and vegetables being lost at harvest or going to landfill. We all know no one in their right mind wastes great-tasting, highly marbled *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB) brand products. That's somewhat in jest, but innovation at all stages, from preparation to storage to creative cuts, helps tackle this challenge. There are examples of improvement in every direction.

I understand the concerns that come with more documentation and increased scrutiny of how we do what we do, but I also believe there is an incredible opportunity to reshape the narrative. We've become more sustainable by making cattle better, and nobody has done that better than the Angus breed. Documenting that has a lot of potential. 



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