

# Linking up the Chains

*Angus Link connects the dots between various segments of the cattle supply chain, but aims to provide the most value for commercial cattlemen.*

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The fragmented nature of the beef cattle industry is part of what makes it so unique. Seedstock producers, commercial cow-calf operations, feeders and packers all contribute significantly to the end product, but differ greatly in their expertise. However, no matter the specialty, all contributors to the beef value chain should be mindful of segments before them as well as the segments after them.

But, in a time where producers have access to more genetic information on their cattle than ever before, the disconnect between segments can still be seen simply due to a lack of communication.

Enter: Angus Link<sup>SM</sup>. The feeder cattle program provided by the American Angus Association.

Angus Link was developed to help commercial cattle producers learn more about their herd. Those cattlemen investing in better genetics were looking for an outlet to communicate added value and to receive a return on that investment. By evaluating the genetic merit of their cattle, they can then market that potential to cattle feeders. In turn, feeders can communicate that potential to packers who are looking to source high-quality cattle predisposed to perform on the rail.

## The seedstock link

While the program was developed with the commercial cattleman in mind, it also provides Angus seedstock breeders the opportunity to extend their customer service by providing their customers a pathway to profitability. After all, the success of Angus seedstock producers hinges on the success of their bull-buying commercial customers.

This concept is one that 2 Bar Angus owner, Steve Knoll, takes to heart. His goal on his Hereford, Texas, ranch has always been to provide functional cattle for his commercial buyers, but his service to customers doesn't stop there.

"Our primary goal is to sell bulls to commercial customers so they can raise cattle that will hopefully get them at the top of the market," he says. "We were excited about Angus Link when we heard about the program because we thought our cattle would fit that program really well."

Knoll regularly recommends the program to his customers. At his last sale, he even gave away 50 Angus Link tags to the volume buyer.

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interested in it," Knoll says. "We try to raise high-performance cattle with good carcass quality, and Angus Link should work really well for identifying those."

## The commercial link

Knoll has been selling bulls to Brandon Brown, owner of Denali Cattle Inc., a commercial outfit right down the road in Hereford, Texas, for about 11 years.

"I think he's bought over 60 bulls from us," Knoll says. "He's been a pretty good customer, and he has always demanded what I consider industry-relevant traits. He wants high growth and he wants ease of calving. He also keep traits in mind that will make people money downstream; and what I mean by that is when the calves go to the feedyard they'll still grow good, when they go to the packer they'll still harvest big ribeyes with a lot of marbling in them, and hopefully they'll go Choice or Prime to get a little more premium there."

Focusing on those downstream traits is exactly the forward-thinking mind-set commercial cattlemen need to differentiate their calves from the pack. But to truly separate them from the others, Brown needed a way to communicate their worth.

Around the inception of Angus Link, Brown was attending one of Knoll's production sales where the topic of the feeder cattle program was broached. It was new and uncharted territory at the time,



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but a program backed by the beef industry's most comprehensive genetic database certainly had Brown's attention.

"We've been buying good genetics for a long time," Brown says. "So, we decided 'Why not?' It's a pretty cheap program to get your calves enrolled, and it's easy. Just give a list of your bulls, and tell them about your cows, and they send you tags, and you're good to go."

Once enrolled, a set of three scores — Beef, Feedlot Performance and Grid — is generated using the genetic merit of the bulls used to sire the current enrollment group and the genetic makeup of the cow herd. Each score is on a scale of 0-200, with a score of 100 representing the genetic performance potential of the industry average feeder calf.

Beef Score predicts genetic potential for feedlot performance and carcass value by looking at expected progeny differences (EPDs) such as carcass weight, marbling and feed efficiency. Feedlot Performance signifies the enrollment group's potential for postweaning performance in the feedlot and considers average daily gain and dry matter intake EPDs. The Grid Score predicts the enrollment group's

performance potential for carcass grid merit, referencing marbling, fat and ribeye area EPDs.

Brown's "Why not?" attitude played out in his favor when he received his enrollment group's scores back. "We knew our numbers and our scores were going to be good — we didn't have any idea they were going to be as good as they were."

One of the first enrollees in Angus Link, Brown still has some of the highest scoring cattle the program has seen so far. Furthermore, his superior scores translated into a tangible return on investment on all the value he's put into his calf crop when he sold them on video back in mid-March.

"I think Angus Link helped our calves do probably \$4 to \$5 better than some of the other calves that were the same quality, same location, just didn't have the Angus Link tag in their ear," Brown says. "It really helped us a lot."

### The feedlot link

For feedlot operators, Angus Link represents a way to manage risk and maximize predictability. Feeders continue to sell a lot more cattle on the grid on a daily basis, and the Angus Link scoring system essentially

allows them to buy cattle on the grid. Rather than procuring cattle not backed with genetic information and hoping for them to perform a certain way at the packing plant, the program provides feeders with a little more information. This enables them to make better decisions in funneling their cattle into the correct channels.

The feeder cattle program is linking up the chains of the beef industry, all while delivering value to every owner of the animal.

Chris Engel, Angus Link director, explains, "The breeder becomes more profitable by selling good bulls and bringing more attention to quality Angus genetics. The commercial cattlemen become more profitable by receiving a return on their investment in quality genetics. And, the feeder becomes more profitable by lessening their genetic risk and knowing exactly what they are putting in their yard. These increased levels of communication and effective use of our industry's genetic tools is leaving less money on the table at every transaction, which translates into maximized profits for everyone in the chain." 