

from the office

LEAD IN

By Richard Spader, Executive Vice President, American Angus Association



If you raised cattle in Australia, Argentina or Great Britain, you would still face the same basic problems that continue to plague the cattle business in the United States—high costs, low prices, unofficial government cheap food policies, and a bias against eating red meat that has seriously weakened demand.

We and the Canadians have one other problem, of course; other countries look at the huge affluent North American market as an outlet for their surplus production, and a source of valuable foreign exchange dollars. The European Common Market, if you can believe it, is subsidizing beef production and has built up such a surplus that they deliver beef to the east coast of Canada cheaper than manufacturers can purchase fresh, locally produced beef.

Of course this puts pressure on Canadian suppliers to export more to the United States. They are further encouraged by the difference in value between the Canadian and U.S. dollar, and the fact that the U.S. government seems to be less interested in merchandising its farmers' products than is the Canadian government.

All of these facts were discussed openly, both formally and informally, at the recent World Angus Forum in

Edmonton, Alta. It doesn't make our plight any easier to know that other countries are in somewhat the same boat, but it makes for better understanding that can someday lead to free trade and a more universal interchange of Angus genetics.

The American Angus Assn. has several opportunities to expand our business with Angus breeders in other countries.

First, we are the only Angus registry organization in the world with a really comprehensive performance records program like AHIR. In fact, because of our size and the dominance of Angus cattle in the United States, we are the only association with the money to support such a program.

This means then that one day we may process a large quantity of performance records for Angus breeders in many other countries. Air mail can bring records to the United States within a matter of days and return them the same way. A breeder in Australia for example, could send his records to the American Angus Assn. and have them returned within three weeks or so.

What's more, it is now possible to test bulls internationally in our Sire Evaluation program. It is already an international rather than a national program. The sire evaluation report that will be issued in next month's Angus Journal will contain information on a New Zealand bull that is currently owned by New Zealanders and is being used almost exclusively in New Zealand. Through the use of artificial insemination, we can effectively test and compare Angus bulls from all over the world in our Sire Evaluation program. Thus, the American Angus Assn. has an opportunity to use its programs to both generate income and help discover superior genetics worldwide.

As breeders in other countries recognize the opportunities for breed improvement through the use of U.S. Angus genetics, it is almost certain

that they will demand elimination of the trade barriers that have been erected over the years. Often these trade barriers are in the form of "health" regulations, rather than official tariffs.

Blue tongue disease is a perfect example. This disease, carried by cattle, is certainly a threat to sheep producers in some countries. But the health restrictions imposed by some governments go far beyond any need to protect sheep breeders. They simply prevent importing of cattle, semen or fertilized embryos directly from the United States.

Canada once was in the same boat. They attacked the problem by simply declaring that Canada is a blue tongue free country. It isn't, of course. Insects and wild animals move freely across the U.S.-Canadian border without the benefit of passport or health papers. And as one Canadian rancher admitted in a private conversation, "well, we really don't have blue tongue, except in British Columbia."

The fact is that effective blue tongue tests are now available and research has shown that the disease is not transmitted in frozen semen and simply cannot be transmitted in frozen embryos. Canadian research, reported at the Forum, shows that "disease free" herds can be developed through the use of embryo transplant procedures. No known infectious diseases, the research showed, are transmitted in embryo.

So it is possible, even probable, that one day there will be a large and free international exchange of Angus genetics through frozen semen and frozen embryos. What's more, the international use of AHIR and Sire Evaluation will help us identify superior animals worldwide. This could well mean that an Argentine-bred Angus bull might one day become popular and well used in the United States. We in the American Angus Assn. need to do all we can to bring about the changes that will make the world an open market for Angus genetics. AJ