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In the late 1960s the American Angus Assn. interviewed five registered and commercial cattle producers on camera for a motion picture titled 'Your Biggest Advantage.' It was made to encourage more members to understand and use the Angus Herd Improvement Records program.

Each of the men interviewed predicted that within a decade or so, it would be difficult to sell bulls to commercial cattle producers unless those bulls had the right kind of performance records in their pedigrees.

These knowledgeable cattlemen were off by about 10 years. By the mid-to late-1970s, the commercial beef cattle industry was in one of the biggest sprees in its history. The cure for most of the commercial cattle industry's problems, it was thought, was extensive crossbreeding with as many different breeds of bulls, both British and Continental, as one could squeeze into a herd.

In the midst of this crossing frenzy, the first Angus Sire Evaluation Report with Expected Progeny Differences (EPDs) was issued. The year was 1974. Soon after, the prospects of field data sire evaluation were being studied, and later perfected. The first Field Data Sire Evaluation Report was issued in 1980. This meant that comprehensive data could be collected on bulls, and EPDs calculated, without having to put a bull through the structured Sire Evaluation Program.

At that point it became possible for cattle producers to accurately compare hundreds of bulls from different herds and from different parts of the country that were raised under a wide range of management conditions.

At about that time the 1960s predictions of the Angus motion picture stars began to come true. EPDs are easy for commercial cow-calf producers to understand. More important, they soon learned that the EPD figures on the performance pedigrees translated into easier calving, heavier weaning and yearling weights, and even improved carcass quality, in their calf crops. They began to buy bulls based on their EPD numbers with increasing frequency.

In the cattle business the decade of the 1980s became the EPD decade, and for the first time it became almost essential to have EPDs on one's registered cattle in order to have a successful merchandising program.

The yearly and monthly American Angus Assn. statistics have documented this new demand and the efforts that members of the Association have made to fill it. Last year the 256,370 AHIR weights processed was an increase of 16 percent over a year earlier, and up well over 100 percent from 1978. So far this fiscal year, birth weights processed are up over 21 percent, weaning weights are up more than 16 percent, and yearling weights show a 14-percent increase. What's more, there are 20 percent more people keeping performance records in the Angus breed than just a year earlier.

Even more significant is the fact that members are asking for far more performance registration certificates (PRC). So far this fiscal year the Association has issued 13,000 more PRCs than a year earlier. They account for about 28 percent of total 1989 registrations. Almost 35 percent of all breeders who transfer cattle request a PRC. They obviously want to merchandise their performance records to the buyer.

My hat is off to those pioneer performance people who appeared in the 1960s Angus movie. They knew what they were talking about, at a time when many people weren't even listening. Their wisdom is demonstrated today as their predictions are coming true.

AJ