



ASSOCIATION

# Lead In

► by **Richard Spader**, executive vice president

## Database provides foundation for making profitable decisions

*I couldn't help but be encouraged by a conversation I had with a North Dakota rancher while attending the Cattle Industry Summer Conference in Denver, Colo. He handed me a report that outlined the carcass information on his calf crops for the past five years. It was impressive, to say the least, and it was being made available to potential buyers when he sold his calves that week on a video auction. I haven't heard how the loads of Angus steers and heifers sold, but I bet they were at or above the market for the day.*

*He knew what his cattle had done on a feedlot-performance and carcass basis, and he was using the information to improve his commercial breeding program and, just as importantly, to market his cattle at a higher value.*

### Dollars and cents

This experience is repeated often in today's cattle industry. Progressive commercial cattle producers and, in this case, a commercial Angus producer using only Angus bulls have worked hard to acquire carcass information about their calf crops. Like Angus breeders, commercial cattlemen want meaningful carcass information and other important performance data from their seedstock producer. If they can't get it, they'll find a producer who can supply the information.

It's strictly a dollar-and-cents issue with commercial cattlemen, and the use of performance data often makes the difference between profit and loss on a cattle operation. It's also one of the reasons why they use registered Angus bulls and American Angus Association programs.

At the same meeting, another Angus producer explained to me an alliance with which he's involved that includes a seedstock producer, commercial customers and a major feeding firm. One important part of the alliance is the exchange of carcass information. Such alliances are common today. Their goal is to determine the true carcass merit and value of the members' cattle, as well as their feedlot performance.

Examples like this illustrate why the Association has been a leader for decades in performance work. Going back more than 30 years, the Association was among the first beef breed associations to embrace the importance of performance. The first cows bred in structured sire evaluation were mated in 1972, and the first *Sire Evaluation Report* was issued in 1974.

Interestingly enough, carcass data was a

part of that first evaluation and report. It took a long time for the industry to fully appreciate the importance of the data, but carcass information is front and center today.

### Still growing

Members of the Association keep more performance records than members of any other beef breed association in the world. Last fiscal year, registered Angus breeders reported and processed an all-time high 684,869 weight records, an increase of 6.7% from 1999. The records were reported by 5,332 members of the Association.

That's impressive, but tempered somewhat when you consider that 16,518 members registered cattle last year. Granted, 11,457 members registered 10 head or less. But the fact remains that we still have many registered producers who need to embrace the performance movement and use the tools available for breed improvement.

As a result of research set in motion in 1997, Angus breeders are now using the first body-composition expected progeny differences (EPDs) derived from real-time ultrasound. In a little more than three years, a total of 139,128 animals have been evaluated through the Centralized Ultrasound Processing (CUP) Laboratory at Ames, Iowa. The tremendous effort by Angus breeders gave rise to the calculation of body-composition EPDs for 7,196 sires, 94,104 dams, 97,340 yearling bulls and 45,388 developing heifers.

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For a CAB staff listing, refer to page 138.

## ▶ LEAD IN

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Of the 5,999 sires listed in the Association's fall 2001 *Sire Evaluation Report*, more than 70% expressed EPDs for carcass traits generated from either structured sire evaluation or ultrasound, including nearly all bulls that had 100 or more calves sired during the fiscal year.

On a broader scale, the entire beef industry knows the kind of cattle needed to increase demand for our product. Research over the years, combined with the National Beef Quality Audit (NBQA), gives us virtually all the information we need to know to compete favorably with pork, poultry and fish. It's a matter of addressing the needs and applying the tools available to supply a consistent, quality product for consumers.

### Another piece of the puzzle

All of this points out the growing trend for Angus breeders to be leaders in the cattle industry. At a time when other meat supplies threaten our profitability, it becomes even more important to determine which genetics in our breed produce a superior product and make money for all segments of the industry.

The future belongs to those who anticipate industry needs and take action to fulfill them. Registered and commercial Angus producers alike are positioning themselves for the future by using carcass data in their selection process.

I predict that, in the years ahead, as much progress will be made in carcass traits as has been made in other important economic traits, such as weaning weight, yearling weight and milk production. Progress will not come at the expense of other traits, rather carcass information will complement existing levels of performance.

Our Association mission is to offer programs that help you, as a producer, reach your goals. We hope you take advantage of the programs, first by helping collect carcass data, then by using the information generated. Carcass information is an important edge that Angus breeders can use to compete in the years ahead.



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