

The Missing Piece

Creating the perfect crop of commercial calves is a puzzle that can only be solved with the perfect Angus bull.

by Megan Silveira, assistant editor

Hours upon hours of dedication and concentration are about to pay off. The nearly complete puzzle is missing only a single piece right in the middle of the image. Without this final piece, the image will never be truly complete.

Puzzle enthusiasts and cattle producers share a common goal — creating something worthy of being labeled as “picture perfect.” Whether it be a scenic view of ocean waves created by connecting hundreds of tiny fragments or the ideal set of calves brought to fruition through a well-thought-out breeding program, both strive to put the pieces of the puzzle together to achieve their goal.

Commercial producers across the nation look to Angus seedstock operations to provide the final piece to the puzzle — strong, Angus sires.

Putting the pieces together

Greg Schafer of Schafer Ranch, Orland, Calif., says today’s commercial cattleman is looking for bulls that excel within their breed while being able to produce calves that meet the same high standard set by their sire. It is up to seedstock producers to put the pieces together to create bulls meeting their customers’ needs.

While there is no “one size fits all” when it comes to bulls for commercial operations, Schafer has

a few suggestions on how seedstock producers can create the genetic pieces to fit the commercial customer’s puzzle. He says bulls that are balanced are desired by cattle producers of all backgrounds.

“You want animals that balance desirable genetics with a strong physical appearance,” he explains.

An animal has to perform both in the pasture and on paper, Schafer adds. Possessing strength on only one-half of the equation could cause any commercial operation’s calf crop to fail.

Finding phenotypically pleasing cattle, Schafer says, is as simple as looking at an animal. Everyone has their own type and kind they prefer, but most producers will be searching for sound, healthy livestock.

With tools available like expected progeny differences (EPDs) and dollar value indexes (\$Values), Kevin Hafner, bull manager at Express

Ranches, Yukon, Okla., says the American Angus Association sets their seedstock producers up to breed for the ideal bull for any commercial operation.

His biggest tip for breeders is to avoid single-trait selection.

“You want a bull that can jump through a lot of hoops rather than just one,” he explains.

By looking at both genomics and phenotype when breeding, Hafner says producers can create livestock desirable for all operations across the country. If a producer’s offering of bulls provides a wide variety, any type of operation will be able to find an animal that fits their individual operation, he adds.

The final image

After producing the bulls for those commercial operations, Hafner says seedstock producers have to begin



the process of securing buyers. When it comes to establishing a connection with those customers, he says, it all starts with creating a lasting, personal relationship.

“I think relationship-building in the beginning is as important as anything,” he says. “It becomes an issue of knowing your customers and knowing what their needs are before you can make educated decisions on what they’re needing and what you’re producing.”

Hafner says once a relationship has been established, seedstock producers are able to determine what type and kind of bull will best fit the operation. From the genetics the commercial producers already possess in their herd to the geographical details about their property, one-on-one interaction with potential customers gives seedstock breeders a plethora of knowledge about their customers.

This knowledge is key to connecting customers to the type of bulls that will thrive in their operation, Hafner explains. Matching an animal’s genetics to areas where they can thrive helps both the seller and buyer achieve success.

At Express, Hafner says, part of their relationship with customers includes personal delivery of bulls. Besides creating another opportunity to interact with commercial producers, delivering the bulls to the property provides a chance to have a personal look at the operation.

In addition to ensuring the placement of the animal goes as smoothly as possible, Hafner says, he uses these deliveries to better grasp the needs of his customers to help

advise them in choosing the bull that best fits their operation.

Selling the final picture

The final step of constructing the puzzle for commercial customers is the process of actually selling the animal. While breeders often focus on creating cattle that check all the boxes, Hafner says marketing those livestock is sometimes put on the back burner.

“You want to utilize all the avenues you can afford,” he says. “It’s an ever-changing world right now, so being able to use all those marketing tools is something a person has to look at.”

From social media and the use of video auctions to print media and advertisements, Hafner says, the list of options when it comes to marketing seems never-ending.

He suggests seedstock producers be open to change. The industry and the preferences of its members are constantly shifting, and cattlemen need to be willing to adapt to meet their customers’ changing needs.

Over the years, Hafner and the rest of the team at Express have come to love the new opportunities brought about by the use of modern marketing, he shares. Social media

has allowed the operation to reach many new customers.

When it comes time to market Angus bulls, no matter what platform is being used, Angus breeders have a definitive advantage, Schafer observes. From the desirable qualities Angus cattle possess to the consumer demand for livestock capable of qualifying for premium programs

like *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®), he believes producers in the Business Breed have a leg up.

Programs like CAB’s *Targeting the Brand*™

help sell bulls, he says, pointing out the logo used to identify the top bulls of the Angus

breed for marbling potential. Engaging in programs established by the American Angus Association or CAB makes Angus bulls even more marketable, he adds.

“The CAB brand and the end results netted by Angus cattle surpass all other breeds at this point, and I think will continue to,” Hafner says. “The CAB push for the brand is one of the best marketing tools you have.”

So, while the task of helping solve the puzzle of building the “perfect herd of profitable commercial cattle” might seem intimidating, a strong Angus bull might be all it takes to complete the picture. **AJ**

