

by Mark McCully
CEO, American Angus Association



Far more than convenience

I was recently visiting with a veteran Angus breeder when he shared with me his concerns about the use of the term “convenience traits.”

His point, and a really good one, was that the value of many traits we have traditionally put in this bucket go far beyond convenience. They have real economic value and should more appropriately be termed “foundational traits.”

I have thought more about this since our conversation, and I sure think he’s right.

Over the years we have typically lumped a bunch of traits that are somewhat hard to quantify into this nebulous category— temperament, udder soundness, structural soundness, polledness, calving ease, disease resistance, heat tolerance and fleshing ability. The term “convenience trait” likely understates the real influence they have on the economics of cattle production.

Now don’t get me wrong — I sure appreciate convenience. My iPhone is full of apps that make my life easier from checking weather to sports scores to the financial markets.

Through COVID, I learned to really appreciate the convenience of online shopping. If we were getting low on dog food, we could pull out our phone, order what we needed, and it arrived on our doorstep a few

days later. From pay-at-the-pump gas to drive-through fast food, we are surrounded by technologies and improvements that make our lives easier.

Traits of value

But the value of a cattle trait such as disposition is hardly just a convenience. The cost of a crazy cow even goes beyond the direct cost of tearing up fence or having the hired man (or worse yet, wife) quit the crew. Research tells us cattle with poor dispositions also don’t perform as well, get sick more easily, and produce a less valuable end product. Angus breeders have long understood this, selected accordingly and implemented a disposition expected progeny difference (EPD) years ago.

A bad udder with big teats is not just inconvenient. A calf that does not get the necessary colostrum puts his health at risk.


This is why the Association has recently rolled out an udder scoring system for breeders to use. While Angus cows have always been known for good udders, with this data in hand we will be able to avoid

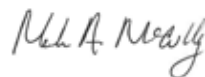
problems down the road with teat size or udder suspension.

The Association launched weekly EPDs for foot structure in 2018. Proper skeletal design is far more than a convenience. Designing cattle that can travel big country and stay sound is imperative to profitable cattle production.

From our research EPDs on hair shedding to genetic selection tools for adaptability to high altitude, the Angus breed has long been committed to breeding problem-free cattle for our commercial producers that will fit their environment.

It is convenient I can make a single cup of coffee in my Keurig machine, but having a cow lay down and calve unassisted should hardly be described the same way.

The Angus breed is known as the Business Breed because they can excel in growth and carcass traits, maternal function, and the many harder-to-measure traits that are beyond just a convenience. 



mmccully@angus.org