

With more than a hint of urgency in their voices, many Angus breeders these days will tell you of the trauma of turning away new bull customers—as well as some old ones from a few years back—because of being sold out of breeding-age bulls.

It is a double-edged dilemma. On the one side, it's satisfying to sell all of what you produce—and for profitable prices for a change. On the other, it doesn't seem right for commercial cattlemen, who want to use Angus bulls, to be forced to use another breed or a black crossbred bull because Angus aren't available. It is a dilemma that will be solved only by increased production of top quality Angus bulls.

Why the sudden strong demand for Angus? Two major factors emerged from a telephone survey of registered Angus breeders and commercial cattlemen conducted by the American Angus Assn.

More Bulls Needed

First, there are obviously more cows and heifers being bred because of the improved price picture. There is very little heavy herd culling, and more replacement heifers are being saved for breeding. This takes more bulls.

But second, and most important, it appears that a higher percentage of commercial cattlemen want Angus bulls to use on crossbreds and cows of other breeds. It is this trend that makes the long-term picture look especially bright for breeders of high quality registered Angus cattle.

"The demand for Angus bulls this year beats anything I have ever seen," said Flint Hills order buyer Rick Grove of Cassoday, Kan. "I had one order for 350 black bulls to go to one New Mexico rancher to use on 5,000 Brangus and Braford heifers. I picked up a few in Kansas and Oklahoma, and then ended up getting 185 head out of Iowa. These were all big yearlings; 2-year-olds were almost impossible to find," he said.

Good Profit

Grove told of buying a truckload of light 2-year-old bulls in Iowa in early April for \$1 a lb., which he thought was probably too high at the time. After running them on grass for a few months, he made \$400 a head on them by just advertising the cattle locally. He figures the demand for breeding-age Angus bulls next year will be even stronger than it was this year. "People are finding out that they can use Angus bulls on almost any kind of cows and get a good set of calves," Grove concluded.

"There are a lot of commercial cattlemen who are tired of pulling calves. That's why they are switching to Angus bulls," said Don Felton, Neola, Iowa. Felton sells bulls to western Nebraska ranchers, many of whom have raised straight-bred Herefords for years. "These ranchers want to know what the bull's birthweight is before they buy," Felton explained.

"Sold Out" ...a Repeatable Story About Demand

by Keith E. Evans
American Angus Assn.

Third Reason

The third reason more cowmen want Angus bulls is because the black whiteface calves are worth considerably more than the straight-bred Herefords, Felton said. The Iowa cattleman was also one of several Iowa Angus breeders who sold a total of 185 big yearling bulls to a Las Vegas, N.M., ranch through order buyer Rick Grove.

Reuben Littau, a registered Angus breeder at Carter in south-central South Dakota, also reported increased use of Angus bulls by traditionally Hereford commercial cattlemen. Littau sells about 75% of his Angus bulls to commercial Hereford breeders, which is up from just a few years ago. "About 60% of the commercial herds in this area are Hereford," Littau said, "and I would say that about 75% of these herds use Angus bulls." Most of them have used Angus bulls on first-calf heifers, according to Littau, and now they breed part or all of their cow herd to Angus.

"These breeders don't want Angus that carry the red gene," Littau said. "They want all their Angus crossbreds from both Hereford and black baldie cows to be black."

Economic Reason

The main reason for the switch is economic, according to Reuben. When one of his good customers saw the black whiteface calves from first-calf heifers out-selling his straight-bred Herefords, he started using Angus on all his cows.

Fran Cherry, a long-time commercial Hereford cattle producer from Mitchell, Ore., is a good example of this trend. "It took me 60 years to learn that I couldn't afford to run Herefords," Morrison said. "We ranch in rough country, and Angus generally do better. In addition," he said, "black

whiteface calves sell better and are in bigger demand." Calving ease and lower labor requirements are two other factors Cherry cited as reasons for using more Angus bulls and saving back more black whiteface replacement heifers.

Some figures show that the average age of cattle breeders is climbing, and this may have an effect on the breed of cattle they use. Don Felton said that many of the older ranchers in western Nebraska are interested in Angus because they have fewer calving, udder and cancer eye problems. It's not just because of their age that cowmen are looking for more trouble-free cattle, he said; it is also because they have a more difficult time getting and keeping good ranch help.

Montana Breeder

At Moccasin, Mont., Wayne Stevenson, a registered Angus breeder, reported that his area (central Montana) once saw very heavy use of exotic cattle. "It's got to the point that breeders can't tolerate all the calving problems," Stevenson said. "One cattleman who was calving 1,000 cows last spring that were bred to exotic bulls drove into our place and said he just had to get away from it for a while. Cattlemen are to the point that they can't stand dead calves."

Stevenson also told of a one-time commercial Angus breeder who crossed his herd with exotic bulls several years ago. The man came to Stevenson's sale last fall to buy five bulls for use on first-calf heifers. He went home with 21 bulls that averaged more than \$2,000 each. The man told Stevenson that he was surprised at the quality of the Angus cattle and the change that had been made in the breed since he last used Angus bulls.

West Coast Account

On the west coast, Bill Borrer, a registered breeder from Gerber, Calif., said that he too has seen some switching back to Angus. "Most of the instances I am aware of in this area are people who have always used Angus bulls on heifers. Now they are just buying and using more Angus bulls."

Phillip Van Neste, Brewster, Neb., who is breeding some 500 Hereford heifers to Angus bulls, summed up the situation this way. "We produce what people want. The black whiteface calves are easy to sell, and the Angus bulls give very little calving problem."

Several people stressed that just any black bull doesn't guarantee a sale. Commercial buyers want size and quality in the cattle they buy, and most demand production records and birth weight information. And in some instances they want assurance that the bulls aren't red carriers.

But there seems to be little doubt that the demand for Angus is increasing at a faster pace than the overall demand for bulls. And Angus breeders who have the programs to produce the right kind of bulls for the commercial industry appear to be in an enviable position for several years to come. 