

Calving Weights

Can the Angus breed expect some problems in this area? Are increased calving weights costing the Angus breed commercial customers? Are those commercial customers trying other breeds? If increased calving weights are affecting demand for Angus in an area, what are breeders there doing about it?

It's an important topic, judging by responses to a letter sent to breeders by the ANGUS JOURNAL.

Editor's Note—

Last spring, prior to deadline for Herd Book, several Angus breeders were asked to comment on one of two topics—embryo transfer or calving weights. To say response was overwhelming would be an understatement—it was phenomenal! Consequently, those responses regarding embryo transfer were included in the Herd Book; the first of those on calving weights began in September and will continue in this issue and the next.

Jim Wolf
Wagonhammer
Angus Ranch
Albion, Neb.

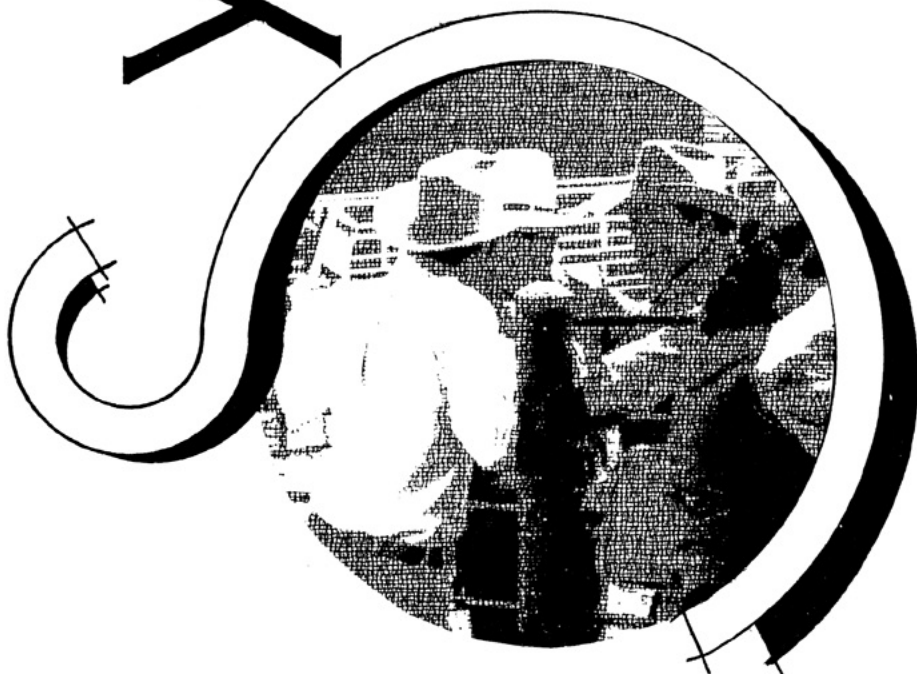


In the 1960s it was commonly said that an additional .3 lb. average daily gain would make Angus the ideal beef breed. In the 80s we have achieved that goal and more, but part of the price for growthier Angus has been a trend to higher birth weights and a corresponding reduction in ease of calving.

Today it is also clear that crossbreeding systems offer the best opportunities for efficient beef production; the crossbreeder needs only to select that combination of breeds that best meets his goals. Fortunately for us Angus breeders—because of ease of calving, fertility, mothering ability, marbling and thin rind—Angus are the single-most popular breed in crossbreeding. A myriad of other breeds are available to provide additional growth. The conclusion is inescapable—Angus breeders must concentrate on those traits in which Angus always have excelled. This does not mean that growth must be ignored. It does mean that our primary Angus traits must not be sacrificed on the altar of maximum growth and mature size.

At Wagonhammer Angus Ranch we increased our average weaning weight over 150 lb. in the 12 years between 1969 and 1980. With that increase came calving problems in our replacement heifers. We increasingly have become aware of the need to balance increased growth in order to regain and improve calving ease. Some of our customers use Longhorn or Brangus bulls on replacement heifers. They would prefer to use our Angus bulls if they could be sure of comparable ease of calving. Here's how we propose to achieve that goal:

(1) Put more emphasis on selecting herd sires with moderate birth weights and outstanding post-birth gain. According to research, this will improve calving ease, reduce mature cow size with only a modest reduction in average yearling weight.



In 1978 we selected a heifer bull that had a 65-lb. birth weight (as a first calf), outstanding post-birth gain and a maternal granddam with a record for producing calves with moderate birth weights and top performance. This bull has genuinely improved the calving ease of our replacement females. In 1978 and 1980 this bull sired a total of 85 calves from replacement heifers with an average birth weight each year of 75 lb. One of his sons was our top yearling weight bull in 1979. The first calves from this son are on the ground. They have moderate birth weights and look promising.

(2) Cull all calves that exceed a maximum birth weight. Our starting point is 100 lb. and may well be lower in the future. We want calves with enough size for stamina, but we are sure that goal doesn't require sires with birth weights in excess of 100 lb.

(3) Cull cows that routinely have heavy birth weight calves.

(4) Cull any cow that has been assisted twice in her life.

(5) Provide our buyers with the average birth weights of the progeny of each sire and dam.

**Arthur V. Bartenslager
D.V.M.
Bellemonte Farm
Churchville, Va.**



Dystocia or difficult birth of beef cattle can be a troublesome or expensive problem. Angus bulls have been and are widely used by commercial cattlemen to help prevent this problem by siring calves small enough to be born without assistance.

Birth weight of a calf is dependant upon several influences, an important one being the influence of the sire. Breeders have recently become interested in birth weights and many are recording this information. Purchasers of bulls are requesting this information more than in the past.

The American Angus Assn. is compiling this information when it is available and using it in the Angus Sire Evaluation Ranking Summary. All bulls entered in the Angus Junior Sire Evaluation Programs have birth weights and any assistance required at birth recorded. The association also is interested in the length of gestation of calves sired by individual bulls and its relation to birth weight.

The first choice we have in selecting a sire that we hope is acceptable is by using his own birth weight as a guide. After he has calves on the ground we can use their weights as a more reliable indicator.

Birth weights of a sire's progeny may have a narrow or a wide range. It is well to know this range as well as the average birth weights. Some bulls can sire calves with a

moderate or acceptable birth weight and still have a rapid growth rate.

Selecting a sire to influence birth size is an important part of trying to control birth weight and it may be the most important item. Selection of heifers to be bred and proper management of the cows and heifers, especially in the last one-third of pregnancy can also have an influence on ease of birth.

**John Holden
Westwind Ranch
Valier, Mont.**



Angus have traditionally been an easy calving breed of cattle. In the past, the commercial ranchers in this area have bought Angus bulls to use on their heifers. I do not think this will continue if the present show ring trend continues. The monsters we are selecting in the show ring certainly will not contribute to calving ease in the future. Larger mature weights and birth weights are highly correlated. If you look at the birth weights of Angus bulls at the bull test stations, it is quite evident that we've increased birth weights in our breed.

The solution to the problem is to back off this size fad and select cattle in the show ring with a muscle pattern and frame structure that are conducive to calving ease. Any idiot can line cattle up by how tall and massive they are.

If we're going to use the exotics for our show ring pattern, then I would say go buy some and leave the Angus to be what they used to be—superior mother cows.

I think the next thing coming in the beef cattle business is cow efficiency. How many pounds of calf can a cow raise in relation to her own weight? The big 1,400-1,600 lb. cow won't do it under most range situations.

We just bought a yearling bull to use on heifers that had a 73-lb. birth weight and nursing index. His mother is a Pathfinder Cow. He is a flat-muscled, frame five bull and I think that is big enough.

**Richard & Judy Weers
Weers Angus Farms, Diller, Neb.**

Nothing is more important at Weers Angus than the unassisted birth of a calf which will then get up and start nursing. We feel a new born calf's ideal weight is between 75-85 lb. A heifer's calf may weigh a little less. When a calf weighs 100 or more pounds at birth, any cattleman knows he can expect calving problems. He has to be ready with the calf puller and be right there in order to save the calf and possibly the cow as well. Everytime he pulls a calf, the cattleman risks the health of both calf and

cow. If the cow is injured giving birth, she may not breed back. Good cows and heifers are costing more all the time so no cattelman wants that to happen. Lady Luck will really have to be with the cattelman who forced to pull a 100 lb. calf which come backwards.

We are doubly concerned here at Wee Angus when breeding our heifers. We feel we are not accomplishing much when we have to pull calves that are too large for our heifers to have unassisted.

When one sits in the coffee shop and listens to other cattlemen discussing the having to use the calving chains and calf pullers on their exotic breeds, the Angus breeder needs to take note. Are we heading in that direction? Is that heavier calf at birth really an improvement in the breed?

So far in southeast Nebraska, we do not feel the commercial customers are leaving the Angus breed. In fact, if they have used the exotic breeds, many of these commercial cattlemen are coming back to Angus. One of the main reasons for this return is the many calving problems. We Angus breeders must keep this trend going in one direction. We simply cannot afford to have the commercial cattelman using other breeds because of increased birth weight in the Angus breed. If the Angus breed expects to sell bulls to these men, he must accept his responsibility in order to stay in the game.

**Les Craft
LaPorte, Ind.**



We have been keeping birth weights high for several years now and have found there are several factors that affect birth weight other than simply the birth weights of the sires we use. We feel that one of the major factors affecting birth weights is cow nutrition. We winter our cows on corn stalks adding good quality hay and 37% protein blocks as needed. In a milder winter, like had in '80-'81, our cows stayed in better condition, obtaining more energy from corn left behind in our stalk fields. The fore we have found that our birth weights for this spring have averaged somewhat heavier (85 lb.). We also feel that with the genetic input of larger framed bulls in operation we have increased our birth weights.

We actually prefer a larger calf at birth (85-95 lb.). We have found that the 60-65 lb. calf seldom catches up with the larger calf by weaning time. We also must realize that with larger framed cows that weigh in the 1,100-1,400-lb. range there is seldom a problem in delivering a 85-95-lb. calf, unless there is an abnormal delivery.

One of the first questions that many of our commercial bull customers will ask is the birth weight of a bull. Often they ask the birth weight and fail to ask the weaning and yearling weights. Birth weight is actually only about 30-40% heritable, so I think that we need to stress the total performance of the bull instead of merely looking at birth weights when looking for so called heifer bulls. We also feel that with the longer, smoother muscled sires that we are using a 90-lb. long-muscled calf can be delivered as easily as a 70-lb. calf that's heavily muscled.

We like to tell our customers that if a bull is long-muscled then his calves will tend to be more that way and although they may be slightly heavier at birth they seldom require assistance. We also feel that if a bull is to be used on cows (versus heifers) there is little reason to be concerned about his birth weight. If the bull is to be used on heifers then his birth weight should be evaluated in making the final buying decision.

I feel confident that we can offer Angus bulls to commercial men and safely tell them that they will be easier calvers, no matter what the circumstances, than any other breed. We also can tell our customers that the Angus bulls will sire the heartiest calves with more vigor at birth than any other breed.

**Forrest Byergo
Barnard, Mo.**

Economic pressure causes most changes or trends in cattle. Most notable is the

change in size that has occurred in the past few years. As size has increased so has the size of the newborn calf which up to a point was good. Experiments showed on the average the heavier the birth weight, the heavier the weaning weight, and that is what the cow-calf man is selling.

Now one of the first questions a prospective customer asks is about calving size. This means it is getting to be a problem and one that will affect the income realized from the calf crop. Anyone producing seed stock must satisfy the customer's demands or he will look elsewhere.

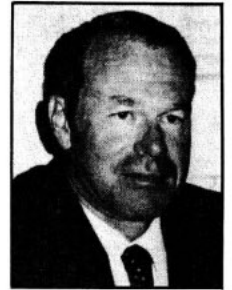
Calving ease is one of the several advantages Angus have always enjoyed and I would hate to see them lose that, but, regardless of the color of the hide, the commercial (or purebred breeder for that matter) surely cannot afford the complications and economic loss caused by calving problems.

Some genetic changes are fairly easy to accomplish, especially if selecting just for one trait such as size, but to increase the size of the parents and hold the calf birth weight to average is asking for traits that contradict one another. Then add to that an average size calf at birth that will wean off as much as the heavy calf and continue on to yearling and past with the desired growth pattern. That greatly narrows the genetic selection. I think this will offer a challenge that we will be working on for a while.

Changes we want to make are usually accomplished by using the extremes that crop

out in the direction we want to go. For example, working with lines or individuals that have shorter than average gestation periods tends to reduce birth weights and also adds a little time advantage in getting the cow bred back. Or maybe we need to take a close look at those exceptional calves that weren't too big at birth but were at the top at weaning.

Whatever it takes, Angus seems to have been one of the more flexible breeds when changes were demanded, so no doubt they will be able to meet the challenge.



**Joe B. Neely
Meadowbrook
Franklin, Ky.**

One of the attributes that has made the Angus breed the superior beef breed is ease of calving. This trait may be in jeopardy. And if you have any doubts about Angus being the superior beef breed just ask yourself, "Why do so many people use Angus in their crossbreeding combinations?" With the striving for bigger and bigger cattle has come higher birth weights. Maybe the top end of our cattle are large enough. Maybe it

is time we threw the yardstick away for show ring appraisal.

Calving ease is hereditary. The largest bulls do not necessarily sire the largest calves at birth; however, there does seem to be a rather strong correlation. Certainly, not all 95-lb. calves come with the same ease or difficulty. If a calf has a long narrow head, long lean neck and well-set shoulders, he will be much easier calving than a calf of the same weight with a short broad head, short thick neck and prominent shoulders. The skeletal make-up of the dam's pelvis also plays a vital part. These characteristics are also hereditary and should be considered in our matings. The cow's nutrition and handling during gestation is also a factor.

What is too high for birth weights? It occurs to me that many birth weights in excess of 90-95 lb. should be sufficient warning that problems lie ahead. I prefer not to see many that high. If I'm in the field planting corn, I don't want to have to worry whether or not 'ole No. 94 is going to make it okay calving. If calving becomes a problem for us as purebred breeders, it is certain to be more of a problem for our commercial customers. If they aren't satisfied the first time they use Angus, there may not be a second.

Our new Angus Sire Evaluation Report can be a valuable tool in breeding around this potential problem. Let's not lose one of the traits that has made our breed great.

Guy Kynerd
Clayhill Angus
Meridian, Miss.



A large percentage of today's Angus breeders' bull market is made up of commercial breeders who are concerned with birth weights. This is a must for them since their management practices are such that they cannot afford calving problems. As we breed our cows to obtain larger weaning and yearling weights we must concern ourselves with birth weights.

Our experiences have shown us that birth weights around 80-85 lb. create no problem, provided the sire is structurally correct. We are very critical of the bulls we use and have used bulls whose birth weight was 100 lb., bred them to heifers, and in five years we have never had to pull a calf whose presentation at birth was normal.

Be concerned, yes, but I do not foresee a problem of major consequences. We can continue to use structurally correct bulls with heavier birth weights, who are larger in frame with faster growth patterns. If we purebred breeders correctly grade the bulls we sell, and offer only the ones that fit this category, then I do not believe Angus breeders lose any business.

If we allow increased birth weights to become a problem for the commercial breeder, then we will lose business to other breeds. Since a high percentage of commercial breeders want their females to be high-percentage Angus, they could also go to Angus bulls.

As we try to analyze this area of today's cattle business, we need to remember that the female can contribute to the calving problem. The smaller the cow, the greater the chance of something going wrong in the calving process—so many times the female is as much at fault as the bull . . . so don't let our Angus bulls be blamed for something that is not their fault.



Joe Reznicek
Reznicek Ranch
Valentine, Neb.

If there is one very important economic trait that for a time was shifted to the back burner in the beef cattle industry it is calving ease. For years we have been so preoccupied with size and growth that calving ease became quite secondary.

Now with some cattlemen using the C-section as a management tool most serious cattle breeders have begun to monitor calf weights and calving ease.

Why? Very simply, dead calves at birth do not add many pounds to over-all weaning weights or calf crop percentages—and just as important, those cows having calving problems are slow to recycle and breed back. It's a double whammy way to lose money in today's uncertain beef industry climate.

The Angus breed is not immune to substantial calving problems. Some commercial cowmen are turning to other breeds for first-calf heifer bulls. The Longhorn breed is receiving a real boost because we in the Angus business have neglected one of our finest traits. Fortunately we Angus breeders still have a very broad genetic base. Just as we identified the lines of cattle with superior growth rates now we must identify those easy calving cattle and make the commercial cowman aware that the Angus breed is still the breed to use on first-calf heifers.

It is the responsibility of every one of us in the breed to monitor birth weights and inform our customers which bulls to purchase for exceptional growth and which to purchase for ease of calving. As we do this over a period of time we will develop lines of cattle that exhibit both of these economic traits.

We know that our breed has the genetic ability to produce most any way we breeders attempt to shape our cattle. We must not neglect breeding and promoting ease of calving. If we do we will surely lose a market

that has helped make our breed the most complete beef breed.

As the lady says, "You can't fool Mother Nature."

Doran L. Bollman
Pulaski, Iowa



Ease of calving has historically been one of the strongest attributes of the Angus breed. One of the economic traits that has sold Angus cattle to the commercial cowman is the fact that their calves are born easily and the cow rebreeds quickly. Unfortunately, since the change to larger type cattle there is now an increasing number of bulls in the Angus breed that can cause calving difficulty. Selection based on high weaning and yearling performance weights and the search for larger mature cattle has led to much larger calves at birth. Heavy birth weight is a major contributing factor to calving difficulty. The heaviest calves at birth usually have the largest head and bone structure and are widest at the shoulders and hips. These qualities cause calves to be delivered with greater difficulty, increasing death loss at birth and causing cows to rebreed slowly.

Calving difficulty is not a widespread problem in our breed today but it will be in the future if we don't work to avoid it. Today a commercial or purebred cowman may use a bull that has traits that cause calving difficulty and get by with a minimum of trouble because of the genetic base of his cow herd. We must remember that the cow contributes genetically to the size and shape of the calf at birth just as the sire does. So we may get by using a hard-calving bull if our cows were produced from bulls and females that excelled in ease of calving.

But what happens when we produce a cow herd that has two or three generations of hard-calving cattle behind them and breed them to bulls with the same characteristics? The results could be disastrous! We will have a high mortality at birth, slower rebreeding and increased labor requirements at calving time. Some purebred herds (especially those where management doesn't calve out the cows) may tolerate this, but the serious commercial cattleman certainly will not! We had better wake up before much of the genetic base of the Angus breed is contaminated by cattle that cause calving problems.

Must we then sacrifice size and frame to retain calving ease? Definitely not! Some ton-plus bulls with exceptional performance excel in ease of calving. Calves can be large-framed at birth and still be born easily if they are slender in shape and not coarsely made through the shoulders and hips. We must put increased emphasis on ease of calving and rank it as equally important

with fertility, frame, performance and structural correctness.

Before you select your next herd bull or A.I. sire make sure he is better than breed average in calving ease. Check with breeders who have used him before and especially those who have used him on heifers. A bull that is not safe to use on heifers should not be used on cows either. When buying an unproven young bull, check on the ease of calving of his sire and dam. We must not accept calving problems as a necessary evil that accompanies big cattle. We are genetic engineers and can breed generations of calving ease into large modern type Angus cattle.

William D. Lazenby
Lazenby
Angus Farms
Opelika, Ala.



In our quest to find big, growthy, healthy bulls we have had to pay more attention to our calving weights. When we are selecting a bull to use in our herd, we look at all of the AHIR data available on calving ease. This data helps us pick a bull that will give us fewer calving problems. We then try to breed heifers to him the first year. This will tell us quickly if we are going to be satisfied with the calving weights of his progeny.

As we have commercial cattlemen visit our herd looking for herd bull prospects, one of the most frequent comments we hear is that we want an Angus bull to breed 2-year-old heifers. We feel that as long as we can supply bulls that require little assistance at calving, we will have a good supply of commercial customers.

We at Lazenby Angus Farms feel that calving ease is one of our best marketing tools in merchandising our bulls. As long as we use data available to us we can control our calving weights and still raise the right kind of Angus cattle.

Eloi Stassen
Stassen
Angus Farm
Marshall, Minn.



As I begin to write my opinions about calving ease and size of calves, I realize I have mixed emotions. For example, when one gets calves that are real small at birth, one definitely suffers pounds later on, especially at the yearling age. On the other hand, I also know that most of you have had young heifers with too large a calf coming and you feel quite nervous about whether

or not you can deliver it. Later, you say to yourself, "I sure wish I had used an easy calving sire," after the heifer is badly crippled for a few days.

I believe real large bulls, with very coarse makeup, with large shoulders and extra heavy bones are inviting trouble.

There are in the breed large bulls which calve very easily, yet grow very fast to a desired weight. A very essential trait, in my belief, is a very smooth and well-blended in-the-shoulder bull, and also a long-bodied bull (so weight can be adjusted in length of the calf) instead of a shorter, thicker calf of the same weight. A long-bodied calf of considerable weight can calve quite easily it seems.

The bulls we are using now are as mentioned above. They are quite tall, long-bodied, trim, free of excess fat and we have never before had such an easy and stress free calving year, yet our year-old bulls are in the 1,050-1,150-lb. bracket.

In the above paragraphs I only mentioned bulls, but equally important is the cow. There are definitely cow families that are very easy calvers. These are the type to build around, especially when they have calves with good, correct frame and size.

Allen E. Opp
Opp Angus Farm
New Salem, N.D.



At Opp Angus Farm we have been taking birth weights on our calves for eight years. From this we have learned that the bigger framed, better performing calves will also be somewhat heavier at birth. The lightest, smallest framed calves are usually the slowest gaining and lowest indexing.

However, I do not believe heavier birth weights will cause the Angus breed any problems, because bigger, faster growing Angus will make more money for the commercial cattleman. Furthermore, bigger framed calves do not necessarily calve harder than smaller framed calves, providing these big-framed calves are long bodied, long necked, and longer legged with longer heads and shoulders that are smooth and well laid in. Calves with wide heads and short necks with excessive bone above the knee through the forearm and shoulder along with wide prominent hook bones are certain to cause calving problems.

I believe the demand for Angus cattle will remain good if we select herd sires with good performance that are long-bodied with longer necks. We must avoid bulls with excessive width at the shoulders and hooks and avoid coarse excessive bone through the forearm and shoulders.

We also must select our females for ease of calving. Usually if a cow calves hard her daughter also will calve hard. We find the

easy-calving female will be feminine with a long slim neck, long and wide rump and wide at the pin bones. The tailhead, however, will be level or slightly above the level of her back and her hind legs will have some set to them. Extremely straight or post-legged females usually have calving difficulty.



David L. Bremer
Bremer Bros.
Metropolis, Ill.

Birth weights are one thing to which Angus breeders have not paid enough attention. Breeding purebred Angus is becoming more and more an endeavor to breed for the commercial man and the traits he wants. The Angus breeder wants to increase the efficiency of his cattle the same as the commercial man and thus the same traits are important. The commercial man knows that to get any returns from his heifers and cows he must first get a live calf on the ground. This calving ease is a function of the shape of a calf and the weight of the calf. Since weight is easy to measure, this makes birth weight an important trait. Progressive breeders are listing birth weight and calving ease criteria as a must in their bull selection differential.

We tattoo our calves the day they are born and it works well for us to take a birth weight at the same time. This birth weight is recorded with the performance information when it is sent in to be processed. The birth weight is presented along with other performance information when buyers visit our farm. We buy our herd bulls with calving ease, birth weight and the shape of calf in mind.

When we have a bull calf for sale with a high birth weight that we feel might give calving trouble we direct it to terminal cross herds to be used on cows. These decisions are based on the birth weights and calving ease we have recorded since 1973 and our experience with each of our herd sires and their sons and daughters.



Vern Domeier
Verola Angus Farms
Sutton, Neb.

Birth weights and calving ease relate directly to the economics and labor involved in a ranching operation. This seems

to be the most talked about subject among cattlemen in the past few years. Therefore, our selection and evaluation of the Angus bulls we use in our program as purebred breeders is paramount.

Many of the other breeds of cattle have had and still have many calving problems. There have been some Angus bulls used quite extensively through A.I. that produced extra large calves. Most good cattlemen soon eliminated those bulls from their program.

We at Verola Farms, through selection, have increased the size and average weight of our weaned calves in the past 10 years from 425 lb. to 565 lb. on bull calves at 205 days of age, without creep. In this same time we have not increased the weight of the newborn calf. This past calving season we have had no calves weighing over 90 lb.

All heifers on our farm calve as 2-year-olds. They must weigh more than 1,000 lb. at two years of age. Most of our heifers are bred to smooth-shouldered bulls of our own raising.

I see no signs in our area that commercial Angus breeders are switching to bulls of other breeds. In fact, the opposite is true. It seems that the crossbred breeder needs the Angus bull on his heifers to insure calving ease. He needs Angus blood in his cattle to sell a more desirable product.



Kent Jorgensen
K&K Cattle Co.
Kearney, Neb.

Are Angus breeders creating problems for the commercial breeder by striving for larger framed cattle? I'm sure many would say "yes" because of calving difficulties due to increased birth weights. We as purebred breeders need to realize that by increasing frame and yearling weights we are going to increase average birth weights. Although Angus cattle are certainly moving in the right direction, we can't afford to forget what our customers desire. They want calves born unassisted that wean well and continue to grow and perform. Ease of calving may be the most important trait—after all the first thing we want is a live calf.

There are steps we need to take in order to give a buyer an idea of how a bull may calve. Of course conformation of the bull can give an idea of calving difficulties. Birth weight of the bull can also be used to the buyer's benefit. It is important to weigh all calves at birth and keep a note on ease of delivery. With these records as a tool, we can help our customers find the right bull for their needs.

For example if you sell a bull to use on heifers, help the buyer select a bull with a

lower birth rate as this trait is heritable. This should reduce calving difficulties and result in more live calves with less problems. If the bull sires calves with great calving problems due to high birth weights the result is a very unhappy customer and a loss of repeat business.

Remember birth weights are being affected as we move toward bigger cattle and many of you may lose business in the future if you are not careful to help select a bull according to the customer's needs. Educating our customers is a definite must if our breed continues to increase the birth weights of its calves.



Gilman C. Stewart
Greensburg, Ind.

This important part of our beef cattle industry is quite complex even though considerable good research has been done in this area. It varies among breeds and interbreeds. Environmental conditions resulting from different geographical areas in the U.S. may also influence calving weights and calving ease.

My personal experience here in Indiana is in the eastern corn belt and my comments result from experiences in this geographical area only. At present no one seems to be very much interested in the subject unless he has had a bad experience. Then he is usually complimentary of Angus cattle. This favorable attitude to Angus probably results from technical information that he has read or opinions gathered from talking to his neighbors who have used Angus bulls as compared with bulls from other breeds. Many who have strayed from using Angus bulls during the 1970s are returning to this breed for their herd sires today.

Our calf birth weights have increased 10-15 lb. since the change in type with no bad effects. In fact, we experience several 90-100 lb. calves now with no noticeable effects at birth. No doubt this favorable observation can be the result of keeping replacement females with more frame. Our cow weights have increased about 200 lb. during the last 10 years. We also think a proper level of nutrition fed to heifers has a positive effect on their ability to have a minimum amount of trouble at calving time.

A few of our commercial customers tell us that they like larger calves at birth because they can stand more cold weather and physical abuse and they generally have more pounds at selling time from those calves.

It appears to me in our area that there are still too many 800-900-lb. mature commercial cows with pinched rumps which are

causing some of the calving problems. However, the cow-calf man is gradually replacing those with the larger framed heifers and cows. Generally, he also wants larger-framed bulls now than 10 years ago.

Acceptable calving weights may not have as much influence on calving ease as much as the type of bull used; i.e. bulls with extremely short, large heads and short-muscled, coarse shoulders seem to cause more trouble.

In my opinion I don't think the Angus breed will ever be in serious trouble if we never use freaks for herd bulls.

**Dan Nelson Jr.
Chadwick, Ill.**



Most calves arrive in our area in the spring when farmers are busy with field work. They expect the cows to deliver and raise their calves unassisted. They, like all of us, want to increase weaning weights, feedlot gain and feed efficiency in their calves, but after trying the exotics they are now quite concerned with birth weight and calving difficulties.

We have not experienced any calving problems in the last two years, primarily through careful attention to sire selection. Our heifers calve at 24 months and with a minimum of attention. The herd is handled very similarly to commercial operations in the area. Any problems at calving result in problems for our customers, so we cull heifers on their ability to deliver as well as to raise a good calf. No replacement heifers that were assisted at birth are retained in the herd.

Angus breeders have many bloodlines to select from which will move cattle in the direction of more efficient beef production without an increase in calving difficulties. Cattlemen have used Angus bulls on heifers of all breeds for many years for their calving ease. We must be on our guard to keep this trait and not lose it for the sake of any inch of height or whatever fad will come along tomorrow.

**Ed Lettunich
Payette, Idaho**

Heavy calving weights are now the No. 1 problem facing the Angus breed. What is alarming is the fact that very few breeders are aware of the magnitude of the problem.

We in the West who make our living selling range bulls are experiencing much resistance in converting new customers to

Angus and in some cases the Angus breed is losing past customers because of the birth weight problem.

The breed in our part of the country that is capitalizing on this situation is the Texas Longhorn.

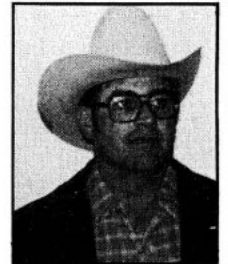
In our own operation, calving weights and maternal traits in general have always been of the utmost importance in selection of herd bulls. We will not use bulls with high birth weights. In our production sale we will attempt to designate the sire groups best suited for first-calf heifers.

The Angus breed's place in the beef industry in the West where crossbreeding is a way of life is to supply maternal traits. If we cannot supply these, we will not be included in two and three way crosses.

Finally, I think it is time for the association to implement a negative index in AHIR.

Also, I believe it is time for the breeders of Angus cattle to direct their effort towards developing complete Angus bulls rather than the bull to move the bottom 50% of the cows of the breed in size.

**Jim Thiessen
Thiessen
Angus Ranch
Lambert, Mont.**



A situation we Angus breeders need to be concerned about is the increased birth weights we are seeing. As the breed continues to push toward the size of exotic breeds, birth weights continue to rise. We will see and experience an even faster increase as heifers with large birth weights are kept for replacements and then bred to large-birth-weight bulls.

English breeds learned a lesson from the exotic breeds when we needed increased size. Now, we should take heed again. Many of the exotics were hurt after the first calves were dropped because of dead calves and Caesarean sections resulting from large birth weights. I am afraid we may find ourselves in the same position if we are not careful.

Large birth weights are affecting the merchandising of Angus bulls. Quite often I hear of a rancher using Longhorn bulls on his heifers. I have seen below average bulls bring better than average prices just because they had low birth weights. This means there is demand and short supply.

Every year at our production sale I have ranchers ask me to mark the best bulls to use on heifers. Every year it has been getting harder. Last year I decided something had better be done. After many phone calls and many miles, I found the bull I wanted. He puts out light calves that take off after they are born. This was something I felt would be ideal, but I never really had made an honest effort to find a bull like that. 