

Don't Throw Away Your Raincoat

by Dr. O.G. "Dan" Daniel
Partisover Ranch, Colbert, Ga.

Don't throw away your raincoat just because spring showers have passed.

We would be looked upon as mighty foolish if we did the above, yet through the years many Angus breeders have become overly excited about various fads and have taken similar action.

The Angus breed is built on maternal traits. And we must not discard the breed's mainstay—the raincoat per se, which has protected us through stormy weather.

Let's take a trip back into Angus history. There was a time when the price of a female was determined by her family name. Even this had some merit when a family became popular because of certain good producing cows. However, as the blood was "diluted" over several generations, the family name really meant little, although prices were still determined on that basis. What would have happened to your cow herd if you had sold all your old, time-proven cattle and bought only "Cherry Blossoms" in their place?

For many years, the champion bull at Chicago was the ultimate. When he was slapped, thousands got on board (through his sons before the days of A.I.) and rode off into the sunset. Every now and then I pull out the Angus Journal and look at all the champion bull pictures from the beginning of time. We have seen some good sires and some that set the industry back. The problem was we had no sound breeding objectives. We just tried to jump from "champ" to "champ."

Then to muddy the water even more, some "authorities" decided families will become smaller, housewives are going to want smaller cuts of meat, and breeders must design cattle to meet this demand that never really existed. So we did. To be fashionable, cattle had to "high center" over a salt block. Through dwarfism and commercial breeders who started breeding their

own bulls, nature got us off that kick. We were fortunate that some breeders hadn't changed their cow herds. They then furnished the genetic material that brought us back to the real world.

So . . . where are we going from here? If you, as a breeder, could design the Angus cow exactly as you want, what would she be like? (Please reread the previous sentence.) I did not say, "What would she look like?" I said, "What would she be like?" I believe all of us would demand that she calve at 2 years of age, wean 40 to 60 percent of her weight in a calf at seven months, and do the same every 12 months for about that many years. If we make her meet these standards, she will take on a form. She will be sound structurally; have a sound, well attached udder; be able to travel and consume ample roughage; and convert that roughage into beef via milk. She will bring repeat business from commercial buyers who will eventually keep the wolf away from your door.

Don't give away your raincoat just because the sun is shining.

Don't destroy a good, sound cow herd. You may need it again sooner than you think.

Progress is brought about by change. But let's remember all change is not progress. And let's not change just for the sake of changing.

Let's figure out why we are changing. Is it because we are: 1) analyzing production facts, 2) trying to be fashionable, or 3) trying to play a game that operates without rules?

We presently have more information and tools to use in building a herd than at any time in Angus history. It's foolish not to use all such tools to their greatest advantage.

We have a maternal breed—that's what we have survived on and will continue to survive on. Let's do everything we can to make the breed better and always keep in mind what we are making it "better for." AJ