

LEAD IN

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The nation's beef cow herd at 33 million head is down by some 43 percent from the all-time high of 57 million cows in 1975. In fact, it's the lowest since the 1960's. What's more, experts don't predict any major upturn at least for the next year or so.

These figures, however, don't tell the full story. Despite the 43 percent reduction in numbers, total beef production is down only 10 percent from 1975, according to the Cattle Fax staff members. The main reason for this, as you might have guessed, is a substantial increase in average slaughter weights, currently at some 1,090 pounds compared to 1,050 pounds in 1975.

It is no surprise that Angus cattle, as well as all other breeds, have increased in growth rate and mature size in the last two decades. This emphasis on growth and related traits is documented in the genetic trend for Angus cattle as measured by the AHIR program and National Sire Evaluation.

Even if demand for beef returns to 1975 levels, and there is good reason to believe that the advertising, promotion, and information programs funded by the checkoff program will achieve this, we won't return to 1975 cow-calf numbers. Consequently, the market for registered bulls will continue to be competitive for the foreseeable future. The competition between breeds will increase and we will continue to see a shakeout in beef breeds. Some, for a variety of reasons, probably won't survive.

So, despite the fact that prices for seed stock will continue strong, we need to advertise and promote aggressively. As we enter the fall selling season, breeders will need to continue to place emphasis on where Angus excel and to explain the Angus advantages to potential customers at every opportunity.

There is good potential for the Angus breed to expand its base in the years ahead. Many things are in our favor, not the least of which is the continued growth of the Certified Angus Beef program and the emphasis that more and more beef merchandisers are placing on quality, as well as leanness in the beef they sell. But if we expand, we will do it at the expense of other breeds, at least in the next few years.

That's nothing new, and nothing that we should be concerned about. Angus dramatically increased their share of the seed stock market in the 1950's and 1960's. Conversely, we lost market share in the late 1960's and 1970's because our product didn't fill the demand of all commercial cattle producers. Today, we have a new Angus product to offer. One based upon sound performance records that is also backed by the traditional Angus advantages of marbling, polled head, solid color, maternal ability, and ease of management.

But people don't beat a path to your door just because you have a better mousetrap for sale. They have to know you have it and that it is improved and affordable. The same is true for an individual Angus herd. The future looks bright for the registered Angus breeder who has a sound breeding program, based upon filling the customers needs, and then backs it with an aggressive, well-planned merchandising plan.

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