

# from the office

## LEAD IN

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If there are questions in your mind about what direction you need to go in this serious business of breeding registered Angus cattle, then a study of the presentations at the 1983 Angus Horizons Conference might help you find some answers.

Though they discussed different topics, several of the speakers agreed on three points: 1. We must not lose sight of the basic traits that have made Angus the No. 1 beef breed and that make cattle breeding profitable. 2. Sound performance testing to discover which animals are the most efficient is essential, and this may require rethinking of some ideas that many have assumed to be fact. 3. It is essential to establish a breeding goal or a destination and then plan accordingly.

Two of the men even used an example from Alice in Wonderland to make the third point. With apologies to the author, it goes something like this: As Alice approached a fork in the road, she became confused and asked the Cheshire Cat, who happened to be sitting in a tree nearby, which way she should go. "Where are you going?" asked the cat. "I don't know," said Alice. "Then it doesn't make any difference," the cat replied.

"Copies of a booklet containing condensations of all the presentations are available from the American Angus Assn. at no charge. In the meantime, here are a few major points for you to ponder.

"I submit to you that we sometimes put a great deal of selection emphasis on factors other than reproduction, growth, composition and longevity-selection emphasis in my opinion that has absolutely no effect on productivity of beef cattle," said Dr. Robert Long, Texas Tech University at Lubbock.

"Now everyone tells you that big cattle are lean, trim, grow faster and are highly desirable," Long said, "But in growth and development we find that different cattle have different growth curves, and if you harvest the cattle when their particular growth curve is appropriate, when they are ripe, then the big cattle might not necessarily have these advantages."

Dr. Danny Fox, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y., expanded on some of these points. Fox emphasized that growth rate and frame size alone are not adequate measures of efficiency in beef cattle.

"How do you identify the most efficient cattle if we say growth rate alone does not necessarily improve efficiency? Very simple," Fox said. "You figure out, for the same mature size cattle, which one grows the fastest. It is that simple."

Different cattle are more efficient on different feeding and management programs, Fox explains. "We must move toward breeding cattle that fit a given feed supply," he concluded.

Dr. Robert Hillier, Master Feeders II, Garden City, Kan., also emphasized the need for predictable performance in cattle. Unknown performance is the biggest problem he has in the cattle feeding business, he told the audience.

Hillier urged Angus breeders not to lose the outstanding carcass characteristics that the breed possesses, and he poked holes in the current myth that "a little ear" makes feeder cattle more valuable.

"I would rather look at the hair on a steer than at his ears," Hillier said. "European cat-

tle have a greater ability to change their hair covering with the season than . . . Brahman crosses. The other features of long ears, excess dewlap and sheath, that provide extra cooling in the summer, continue to act the same way in the winter, which is bad. . . . Therefore, we are quite cautious about taking on short-haired, eared cattle for winter feeding unless they can be purchased at sufficiently less (cost) to offset the anticipated performance."

"We are going to have to change our standard of living perhaps in some ways," said Oliver Hansen, Liberty Trust and Savings Bank, Durant, Iowa, when assessing the future financial situation. Hansen doesn't see any quick turnaround in the economy but urged people to maintain confidence in our system. ". . . We have worked out of times like this before, and we will in the future," he said.

The Angus breed is much more important than the individual Angus breeder, reminded the Rev. Robert Snyder, Neosho, Missouri. "Be solemnly assured that our Association's purpose is distinctive. And because the breed comes first . . . breeders who have taken more from the breed than they have given have never been able to meet the test of time," said Snyder who worked for the Association some 20 years and served as director of public relations before he resigned to enter the ministry in 1978.

Finally, three challenges were issued to Angus breeders by Dave Pingrey, Black Bull Cattle Co., Benton, Miss. They are: (1) Maintain the quality image of beef. (2) Expand the Certified Angus Beef program and (3) Remember and perpetuate the grass roots reasons the black cow is in the center ring (of the beef industry) so we are sure that she stays there. If we do these things, Pingrey predicted that on the bicentennial of the American Angus Assn. there will be only two qualities of beef-Certified Angus Beef and an overall house brand. And the Nation's beef cattle population? That's simple-it is going to be Angus and minor breeds:"

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