

Tools to market Angus genetics

BY JAMI STUMP

Helping increase profits for Angus genetics is the priority of the American Angus

Association's Commercial Relations Department and its listing service, the Angus Resource Clearinghouse Network (ARCNet).

ARCNet is one of the newest additions to the marketing arsenal available to producers through the Association. It gives breeders a place where they can list on the Association's Web site feeder calves and replacement females, as well as cattle wanted, that stem from Angus genetics.

Since its inception and the first ARCNet listing in September 1998, breeders are benefiting from the program. As of Sept. 23, 1999, 108 producers had listed 18,731 head of feeder cattle on ARCNet. More than 13,145 replacement females had been listed by 189 producers.

"This is a wonderful marketing tool for commercial and seedstock producers alike," says Joe Rickabaugh, former manager of Genetics Plus, Topeka, Kan.

Genetics Plus listed 150 Angus and Angus-crossbred heifers on ARCNet. That listing resulted in a call from a Kentucky cattleman and the eventual sale of the 150 heifers.

"The number of people [who] can be reached is phenomenal by using ARCNet," says Rickabaugh. ARCNet allows breeders to go beyond state boundaries and market their cattle anywhere in the United States.

Cattle are listed on ARCNet by state. Information about the animals' breed identity, genetic composition, past performance, carcass history, herd management, vaccination practices and marketing plans are included in the listing. Marketing plans can include auction marketing, video marketing, private sale or retained partial ownership.

"We are continually trying to make improvements in the program so that breeders can give more detailed information about their offerings and buyers know more about the genetics they are purchasing," says Bill Bowman, the Association's director of commercial relations.

Breeders with Internet access can make listings directly on the ARCNet site at www.angus.org. Once on the Angus home page, breeders simply go under the heading "Quick Links" to the ARCNet subtitle. On the ARCNet front page, halfway down, there are access links to a feeder-cattle form, a replacement/breeding-female form and a cattle-wanted form.

"No longer do you have to solely market your livestock in publications that are not always timely," says James Collins, an ARCNet user from Opelika, Ala, who sold a set of heifers listed on the service. "ARCNet is available 24 hours a day, and you can place listings whenever it is convenient for you."

The ARCNet listing form is also available in hard copy through the Association and its regional managers.

"I think that if we can make more breeders aware of the listing, they will see an economic advantage to using the program," says Bowman. "Our intention is to lead buyers back to the registration paper and the EPDs (expected progeny differences). We want breeders of Angus genetics to have a place to market their product and obtain a premium price."

■ Better than the mix

Fred and Clara Wilson, Newcastle, Wyo., have listed both feeder and breeding cattle on ARCNet. They are concerned that producers who breed cattle for superior genetics and premium beef products are having to sell their cattle with those that are only average.

"In the same pen at feedlots, too much of the time you see good cattle, so-so cattle and inferior cattle all combined, making an 'average' group," says Clara Wilson. "Superior beef needs more identity and credit for a better product. Prices should reflect that there is a difference."

Bowman says one of the goals of the program is to gain recognition for those breeders of superior Angus genetics.

"This program is trying to help meet the demand for high-quality beef and animals with known Angus genetics," says Bowman. "It has been identified both in studies and through the success of the Certified Angus Beef (CAB) Program that Angus genetics contribute to the development of a superior

meat product that results in an enjoyable eating experience for the consumer."

■ Meeting buyer needs

To meet buyer needs, fax sheets and letters are sent to licensed feedlots to let them know about current offerings of cattle with Angus genetics.

"It is a great convenience for me to have the information faxed right to me about the cattle that are being offered," says David Steen, who uses ARCNet in buying cattle for Poky Feeders, Scott City, Kan.

Steen uses the information to track down large numbers of cattle. He has made trips to both Oklahoma and Montana to look at cattle that were listed.

"I need to know that the cattle I get will grade," says Steen. "The more I know about the animals' bloodlines, the less guesswork I have."

Steen sees only advantages to the program and what it offers for feedlots, commercial producers and Angus breeders.

"This is the only type of breed listing that I receive," says Steen. "Angus breeders should expound on it. It is a wonderful marketing opportunity."

Increased use of the Internet and producers' becoming more comfortable with the program will only lead to added use.

"Breeders and users of the program should help educate other possible users," says Bowman. "We have to keep in mind that this technology is new and foreign to a lot of producers; yet as more people become familiar, the more the listing will expand."

Current users are optimistic about the program and see only exciting opportunities for growth.

"I think the Internet listings are just going to grow and grow," says Eldon Cole, Mount Vernon, Mo. Last October Cole, who is a regional contact for the Missouri "Show-Me Select" heifer program, was involved in listing the group's sale heifers on ARCNet.

"As more people get computers and are educated about the opportunity and advantages, we will see more listings," says Cole. "I encourage all breeders of Angus genetics and buyers to use ARCNet as a tool to help their marketing program."

