

Speakers Encourage Producers to Focus on End Product

BY SHELIA STANNARD

Nearly 400 Angus enthusiasts from 30 states, Canada and Australia gathered Sept. 25-27 in Lexington, Ky., for the 2000 National Angus Conference and Tour. The conference, themed "Angus — Setting the Pace for the Beef Industry," followed a day-and-a-half tour of Angus herds in the Bluegrass State. The three-day event was made possible, in part, through a partnership with Pfizer Animal Health.

Keynote speaker Gary Smith, distinguished professor of animal science at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, emphasized that producers must be consumer-focused rather than customer-focused.

"Can you satisfy the people who are going to sit down and eat your product?" Smith asked those in attendance.

Consumers have six key concerns — safety, healthfulness, affordability, preparation ease, convenience and taste — that the beef industry must keep in mind, Smith said. He identified Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) as having a branded beef program that has experienced continued success, even in times of decreased beef demand. He said that brand identity would lead to brand loyalty and eventually to brand equity in the beef business.

"Just imagine a beef industry in which the targets are agreed upon in the beginning and based upon what customers want and what consumers will purchase and eat and enjoy," Smith said. "Just imagine a part of the foundation of a new beef industry that has progressively greater reliance on Angus genetics by the cow-calf producers of North America."

Essential tack

John Crouch, director of performance programs for the American Angus Association, agreed that producers are in the food business, not the cattle business. He discussed the use of expected progeny differences (EPDs) to improve the end product.

Crouch compared livestock improvement to planning a trip. First, the industry must know where it is. Second, the industry needs to know where it wants to go. And third,

they must plan a route. The *Sire Evaluation Report* is one tool many have used and will continue to use to improve their product.

"Due to the low genetic relationship between marbling and other carcass traits, we can increase marbling, ribeye area and percent retail product and decrease external fat with the same sires," Crouch said. "Our job is to identify the sires."

Mike Kasten, a commercial cattle producer from Millersville, Mo., said he selected Angus cattle for his 450-head operation due to several factors. He wanted to produce higher-quality cattle that would make a profit. He also was looking for cows that could produce on grass and wanted a wide selection of higher-quality genetics with which to work. During the past three years, 20% of his calf crop has met *Certified Angus Beef*[™] (CAB[®]) carcass specifications.

"In this breed we can have it all," Kasten said. "Our data would show that, with the right bull selection, you can have both high-grading and high-gaining traits in your cattle."

The future of the industry, Kasten said, is dependent on the seedstock producers' and the commercial producers' working together to produce genetics to fit the demands of consumers. He suggests producers forge marketing alliances, work closely with one another to obtain profitable genetics and facilitate recreational producers' participation in breeding decisions that result in a desirable end product.

"It's not what I learned about today, but it's what I do about it when I get home."

closing remarks of Executive Vice President

RICHARD SPADER

Current opportunities

Consumers are still passionate about beef, said Ray Ramsey, director of the MLE Marketing Division of Southern States



2000
NATIONAL
Angus
CONFERENCE
& TOUR

September 25-27
Lexington, Kentucky

Cooperative Inc., Richmond, Va.

"When is the last time you heard someone say, 'that was a great piece of chicken I ate last night?'" he asked. He added that now is the time to take advantage of the better economic climate to regain lost market share for beef.

It is key that all segments of the industry understand each other. For continued success in the future of the beef industry, Ramsey encouraged increased use of source verification and alternative feeder-calf marketing options, such as genetically similar sales, Internet marketing and producer-feeder contractual agreements.

Mark Gardiner, president of Gardiner Angus Ranch Inc., Ashland, Kan., said cattle producers have more opportunities in the beef business today than they ever have. The producers must take advantage of resources like the Association's performance database and *Sire Evaluation Report*.

"Data-based selection is not a fad — it is here to stay," Gardiner said. "We will see more improvement in the Angus breed for carcass traits in the next five years than we have seen in the previous 30."

"If we wake up and use the data, we can do anything and everything," Gardiner told the audience. "There are no good or bad EPDs. Breeders must select the traits that will work for their individual herds. Beef producers will want to work together to produce a high-quality, safe product for the consumer."

To obtain a copy of the 2000 National Conference proceedings, call (816) 383-5100. Photographs and information about the conference and tour are also available online at www.angusjournal.com/nationalconference.

