

LEAD IN

by Richard L. Spader, Executive Vice President
American Angus Association



A Challenge to Angus Breeders

Future growth of the Certified Angus Beef Program, as well as the growth of our breed, will be determined in large part by two things:

First – The speed at which the commercial industry increases its use of Angus bulls.

Second – How fast registered Angus breeders improve marbling ability of their cattle.

Mick Colvin, executive director of the Certified Angus Beef Program, estimates that we could exhaust the supply of qualifying cattle in 1994 or 1995, if Certified Angus Beef™ product sales continue to increase, and supply remains constant. Fortunately there is evidence that commercial cow-calf producers are using a higher percentage of Angus bulls than in previous years.

Since 1980 we have helped sponsor a survey of commercial cow-calf producers. Each year we ask producers what breeds of bulls they purchased in the past 12 months. The results have been revealing.

In 1980 some 32.9 percent said they had purchased at least one Angus bull the previous 12 months. The next highest was Hereford with 27.5 percent, and third was Simmental with 12 percent. By 1985 only 26 percent of commercial producers reported Angus bull purchases. Hereford was down to 18 percent and Simmental had climbed to 15 percent. A year later (1986) Simmental beat out all breeds with more than 19 percent of producers reporting Simmental purchases. Angus was second with 17.5 percent and Hereford had dropped to just under 14 percent.

Then the tide began to turn. By 1990 Angus purchases had grown to 28 percent, Simmental was second with 24 percent and Limousin and Charolais were tied for third with 18 percent. A year later Angus purchases grew to 34 percent and the 1993 survey showed that the number of commercial breeders who purchased an Angus bull in the previous 12 months had jumped to 43 percent. This compared with 23 percent for Charolais, 22 percent for Simmental and 17 percent for Limousin.

Bull buying patterns have changed over the last decade or so with a strong shift to Angus. This means, for example, that when the calves from cows bred in 1992 come to market there should be a higher percentage of predominantly black finished cattle available for slaughter.

Despite this progress members of the American Angus Association can't sit back and rest on their laurels. During the past fiscal year only 18 percent of the predominantly black cattle that

qualified visually for the Certified Angus Beef Program actually had carcasses which met Program specifications. We need more bulls with expected progeny differences (EPDs) for carcass merit going into commercial herds.

Some commercial cattle producers are already actively searching for bulls with positive carcass EPDs, especially for marbling. They are a small minority today, but their numbers will increase. It is a simple fact that USDA Choice carcasses are in bigger demand than USDA Select. When producers retain ownership and sell on grade and yield they lose money on every carcass that fails to grade Choice.

But there is more to the quality story. A recent National Cattlemen's Association (NCA) Strategic Alliances beef quality study found that British breed cattle that grade USDA Choice have a higher overall palatability rating than British Select. That's not surprising. But it also found that British breed cattle that grade USDA Select have a higher overall palatability rating than Continental breed cattle that grade Choice. Furthermore, the study found that Continental breed Select cattle were often rated by the sensory panel as "unacceptable." Bull buyers will find it hard to ignore this information.

Many Angus breeders already recognize the potential for merchandising positive carcass EPDs. During the past year Association members tested 114 bulls for carcass characteristics. This is a small percentage of the overall Angus bull population, but it is significant. During the past fiscal year there were 17 Angus bulls that sired 1,000 or more calves registered with the Association. Of this number, 13 had carcass EPDs and seven of the 13 were positive for marbling. Those seven bulls sired nearly 11,000 calves that were registered last year. These numbers are sure to increase as more bulls are evaluated and more positive ones are used within the breed.

Our goal is fairly simple: To expand the percentage of Angus bulls being used in commercial herds, and to improve the carcass characteristics of all registered Angus bulls. It is easier said than done. Fortunately we have the information to improve our breeding programs and the talent and incentive to get the job done.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Richard L. Spader".