

A Hot Area for Angus Growth

Feeder survey says Southern producers need more Angus genetics.

by *Corinne Blender & Susan Rhode*

A recent survey of High Plains feedyard managers indicates they would like more Angus influence in the cattle coming from the Southern and Southeastern regions of the United States. The Southern-Southeastern Feeder Cattle Quality Survey (SSFCQS) was recently conducted by Slaven Associates, Cimarron, Kan. It revealed some interesting facts about feeder attitudes toward Southern-origin cattle.

The survey included 135 feedyards in the High Plains area, which includes Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado and Nebraska. Feedyard size ranged from 5,000 to more than 100,000-head one-time capacity, with an average size of 33,385 head.

Feedyard managers were asked to respond to questions based on cattle received from the Southern and Southeastern regions of the United States, which included Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina and Florida. Greg Slaven, president of Slaven Associates, says the cattle industry in the South and Southeast was the target of this study because this

“Feedyards say premiums are being paid, especially for feeder cattle and calves with a strong health history and desirable breed composition.”

— Survey results

area encompasses more than 13 million beef cows totaling 40% of the nation's beef cow population.

Cattle feeders generally believe Southern cattle have improved in health, uniformity, rate of gain, feed efficiency and carcass traits over the past 10 years. However, they also view genetics as the primary reason for low quality grades in cattle from this region.

A total of 85% of feedyards surveyed recommended that producers use more Angus genetics in their breeding programs. In addition, 14% felt producers should use the same level of Angus genetics that they currently are using, totaling 99% of respondents who feel Angus should be an integral part of any herd in the South.

In reference to other breeds or breed types, 76% felt producers should use less

influence of heat-adapted breeds and 57% felt producers should use less Hereford influence. In addition, 43% indicated an adequate amount of exotic or Continental breed influence already was found in Southern cattle. However, an animal with a crossbred genetic profile seems to be preferred by most.

“For the first time ever, cattle feeders as a group have spoken directly to Southern cow-calf producers by participating in this survey,” Slaven says. “Anyone serious about making the beef business better and more profitable for all industry segments should take this message seriously, especially producers and industry influencers in the South and Southeast.”

“This survey reconfirms what our members have been telling us about the opportunities for Angus genetics in the southern United States,” says John Crouch, executive vice president of the American Angus Association. “We feel a broader use of Angus genetics in more Southern herds can improve the overall quality of cattle that enter the food system and ultimately the product we're providing to consumers. These feedyard managers seem to agree.”

Individual feeder perspective

Dan Miller, co-owner and operations manager at DM&M Feedyard, Cimarron, Kan., says he has been feeding Southern cattle for a long time. The Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) feedlot partner has been in the cattle feeding business since 1973.

“When we first began procuring feeder cattle or stockers out of the Southeast, health was always an issue. To detour all those problems we went to the North, and we were buying primarily Northern cattle, mostly Angus-type breeds,” Miller says. “But we felt they were a little pricey. By the time we went back to the Southeast and East,

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the general genetics in a lot of those cow herds had improved.”

Proactive producers in the South and Southeast have realized the profit potential of having a genetically better product in tune with what the market demands, he says. And they’ve instituted some vaccination programs to address health problems.

DM&M has been working with groups such as the Kentucky Cattlemen’s Association to purchase cattle through their Kentucky Feedlot and Carcass Tests (FACTS) program. These cattle have a known health history. Miller says health programs such as this have greatly improved the quality and health of the cattle and their ability to stay healthy while on feed.

Miller says he agrees with the survey results in which 85% responded that Southern producers should use more Angus genetics in their breeding programs.

“I think you would see exactly what we are saying if you came out and took a tour of our feedyard,” Miller points out of the Angus-based cattle in his yard. “I want that order buyer, whether he is coming out here on a daily or a weekly visit, to come to our feedyard first because he knows the type of quality cattle we are going to be feeding at our facility. I don’t want to be the last stop on his visit every week. I want to be the first stop. If I’ve got the product here, he is going to be here.”

Miller doesn’t want to discredit other breeds, but he says that Angus has an advantage, and it is what consumers demand. The vision he has for the beef industry is a common one he feels he shares with CAB.

“When I take my family to a steak house and spend that kind of money for a meal, I want it

to be a good meal, a good eating experience. I don’t want to sit down to a piece of shoe leather,” he says. “The consumer is demanding where this market is going. They are going to send the message to the packer, and the packer is going to send it to the feedyard, and the feedyard is going to send it right back to the cow-calf producer. It is just coming backwards at them.”

Miller says he will continue to procure cattle from the South. He points out that the preconditioning and health programs in play right now have benefited cattle in that region. Programs that were once set up to bring cattle in when it was time to “pay the bills” and vaccinate on that schedule have gone by the wayside, Miller adds. The cattle may still be raised in rough, dry brush country, but the shift to more intensive management will make sure all cattle are well accounted for.

Southern producers have things set in motion, he says, to entice feedyards to continue to procure cattle out of that area. “When you get a good thing going you want to capitalize on it. I think that is where they are headed.”

Southern and Southeastern cattle will continue to fill feedyards throughout the country. The Angus influence in the South will continue to spread.



Editor’s Note: To obtain the complete Southern-Southeastern Feeder Cattle Quality Survey, contact Quentin Conant at qconant@prismgroup.net.

Characteristics of Southern cattle as perceived by survey respondents

Category	Average score*
Health	2.39
Uniformity	2.78
Predictability	2.96
Daily gain/feed efficiency	3.03
Quality grade	3.07
Grid/formula premiums	3.14
Yield grade	3.44
Dressing percent	3.61

*Results based on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=very poor; 5=excellent)

Desired genetic influence

Breed/breed type	More	Same	Less
Heat-adapted	0%	24%	76%
Exotic (Continental)	33%	43%	24%
Angus	85%	14%	1%
Hereford	11%	32%	57%

Recommended breed percentages

Breed/breed type	None	1%-25%	26%-50%	51%-75%	>75%
Heat-adapted	19%	75%	5%	1%	0%
Exotic (Continental)	5%	24%	54%	17%	0%
Angus	0%	7%	40%	41%	12%

Key survey findings

- ▶ 93% of participants believe feedyards have become more knowledgeable about Southern feeder cattle and calves during the past decade.
- ▶ A majority of feedyards say they currently pay premium prices for feeder cattle and calves based on their uniformity (67%), strong health (81%) and desirable breed composition (87%).
- ▶ Cattle feeders were split on the importance of individual animal traceback in today’s industry environment (51% said traceback is important; 47% said it is not; 2% were unsure). However, 84% believe that in five years traceback will be important to the beef industry (8% said it won’t be important; the remaining 8% were unsure).

