

Tools at your disposal

We as Angus breeders are fortunate to have a broad genetic base and tremendous variation within the Angus breed. We are also fortunate to have at our disposal a suite of genetic tools and dollar value indexes (\$Values) that can be used to affect directional change within the breed.

Direction of the breed

That said, while attending the Cattle Industry Annual Convention and NCBA Trade Show in Nashville, Tenn., earlier this year, I worked the booth, visiting with people and feeling generally proud to be in my home state again.

During the course of the afternoon I had the pleasure of seeing an old friend and registered breeder of great renown. In passing, he indicated he had penned a letter to our staff relative to his opinion of the direction of our breed.

In relating this dialogue to you, please let me qualify my comments. It has never been a policy of the American Angus Association to suggest what an ideal Angus animal should be from a type or size standpoint. However, it has been our policy to characterize and quantify the population of purebred American Angus

cattle relative to measurable genetics that affect profitability. It is then the responsibility of each breeder to determine his or her direction based on available resources, existing markets and consumer demands.

Finding the right fit

I'll paraphrase some excerpts from the letter, which was on my desk when I returned.

He related that his program, dictated by favorable economics and positive trends in the Angus breed, had certainly been financially rewarding. He further concluded he was becoming alarmed by the number of Angus cows crossing the scales at 1,500 pounds (lb.).

His point was further illustrated by the following anecdote.

"On a recent bull delivery trip, it developed

I had taken a right turn instead of a left at an intersection. About 10 miles down the road I told my wife we were really making good progress, but the upcoming road sign suggested we were going in the wrong direction."

Later during the week, a Texas cowman was talking to me about the economics and efficiencies of the cow business in his part of the country. During the course of the conversation he got around to mentioning that his cows were getting entirely too big to operate efficiently.

"What can I do," he asked, "to bring cow size down?"

Further to the question, several convention speakers, as well as the recent National Beef Quality Audit (NBQA), alluded to increased carcass size and excessive weights of high-priced cuts of meat.

Tools available

The facts regarding this situation are crystal clear. There is a positive genetic correlation between yearling weight and mature weight, but it is not perfect, suggesting that it is certainly possible for one to select seedstock for increased yearling weight and decreased mature weight. (See "By the Numbers" by Bill Bowman on page 169 of the October 2006 *Angus Journal*.)

Secondly, cow energy values (\$EN) are available to assess dollar differences in maintenance and lactation energy costs per

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REGIONAL MANAGERS—Refer to page 271.

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cow per year. So, should one apply selection pressure on \$EN, other things being equal, the result over time would be a reduction in mature size and milk. Also, mature weight and height expected progeny differences (EPDs) could be used individually to apply pressure strictly on cow size.

Thirdly, the Angus optimal milk module allows breeders to input pasture and forage conditions, feed costs and mature cow size to arrive at customized optimal sire-daughter

milk levels that best fit their particular scenarios. This handy tool is available online at www.angus.org/tools/optmilk/index.html.

Fourthly, in the past 15 years adjusted average weaning weights have increased 50 lb., and average adjusted yearling weights have increased 97 lb., while yearling frame has remained virtually the same. The genetic trends for weaning and yearling EPDs are posted at +34 lb. and +73 lb.

There is no question that Angus cattle are

genetically different from a weight standpoint than they were 15 years ago. So the simple conclusion is that if you, as a breeder, wish to affect directional change to better serve your customers, you have the tools at your disposal to do so. It's a question of knowing what cows work best in each production environment.



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