



Angus Stakes

► by *Shauna Rose Hermel*, editor

Do you want to stay in business?

I've always championed midsize producers. After all, they provide the lifeblood, the sustainability, of the breed — small enough scale not to edge us toward corporate control and yet large enough to be raising cattle for a living. Small enough scale to be animal husbandmen instead of mass distribution managers, yet large enough scale to make breeding decisions based on the traits that will sustain the breed and the industry for coming generations.

Well, where the blazes are you? And what are you doing to stay in business?

Is anyone there?

If there ever was a time to stand up and say we are here, and we do want to stay in business, the time is now.

There is no doubt we have some years in front of us that appear to have their share of difficulties. In the coming years we face higher feed prices, more competition from ag and nonag sources for land, a smaller voice in state and federal government, and rapidly changing technology that will force us to learn new skills.

But if you want a future in agriculture for yourself and for the next generation, now is not the time to be grumbling about how tough life is. We've had some darn good years in the cattle business. We are in the best position of any breed in the business. We have the network of programs and services in place that can propel us through even difficult economic times. We should be building upon those strengths.

Understand your power

I don't mean this column in a derogatory way to the other segments, for they each are a vital part of our breed and association. But their viability is not in question today; the viability of midsize seedstock herds is. And without them, the beef industry loses a vital segment.

Without midsize herds making independent breeding decisions we would lose some of the genetic diversity that makes the Angus breed so resilient in a future that promises only change.

Without midsize seedstock herds to buy the "breeder" bulls and donor dams, the value of those animals would crumble and profit margin would disappear from the industry.

Without the midsize producer we lose ability to answer the needs of a diverse customer base.

Without the midsize producer we lose the discussion process that generates ideas and fosters progress.

What makes helping the folks in this disappearing middle tier so hard is that they often seem to be more afraid that the midsize guy down the road or the big outfit in the next state might get more out of a program or service than they do. They expend more energy in putting a competitor or program down than they do in coming up with ways they could work together to advance the whole.

This could get me in trouble

Instead of bellyaching about how somebody figured out how to work the EPDs to their advantage, realize that your Association is unequalled in its ability to monitor and edit

data submissions to ensure accuracy. And those very EPDs are what keep you in the game and give you a level playing field.

Instead of discrediting the system when a bull's birth weight EPD changes with the addition of a year of progeny data, remember what EPDs are — expected progeny differences. And while they are the best predictor of performance to date, they are not guarantees of performance. As God puts those millions of combinations of genes together, every now and then one has a totally unique makeup. Isn't that the one we're all looking for?

I could go on and on if my soap box were bigger, but here's the big one in my mind:

Instead of complaining that you can never get a bull into a stud to be used by enough herds to move his EPDs and therefore you will always be at a disadvantage to the big boys, tell the Board they were right to table the discussion on Angus derivatives; they need to go further. They need to be keeping data on every cow owned by a customer of a registered Angus animal and anything less undermines your ability to compete in the future cattle industry.

You want to prove your genetics? Where are you going to do it but in the commercial cow herd? You want ammunition against the heterosis hype, how are you going to get it without keeping data on the commercial cow herd?

Let your commercial customers know you are in it to help them survive, too, not just to protect your own skin.

Well, I'm probably being a little more honest than I should be to be politically correct, but this is my page, darn it, and I could never forgive myself for not saying it. In bending to the negativity heralded by the derivative issue, it's my opinion the Board and staff are dropping the ball by not aggressively pursuing data collection on and analysis of the commercial cow herd.

If I'm the only one in that camp, so be it. Thank you for letting me air my view. That's all I can do; you can do more.

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