



Field Notes

► by **Matt Caldwell, Richard Dyar & Rod Wesselman**, regional managers, American Angus Association

Focus on females

Regional managers **David Mullins** and **David Gazda** provide marketing and management advice relevant to selecting females.

What trends do you see from commercial producers in their demands for heifers?

David Mullins: Without question, *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) and the *AngusSource*® program have steered commercial producers to select replacement females with a high percentage of Angus genetics. In addition, I feel that the American Angus Association staff has done a great job of explaining to commercial producers the growing importance of providing information and performance data to their potential customers. In turn, this has created an increase in demand for replacement females with additional genetic and performance information.

David Gazda: As recent as five years ago, producers' demands were much more simple. They wanted black-hided replacement females that were at an acceptable weight to fit into their breeding program. Today, with the way the industry has changed in the demands for quality,

consistency and predictability in the feedyard and on the rail, producers realize that they have to know more about source, genetics and management of the cattle they buy. In my region, cattle that were acceptable in the past have now become a commodity-type item and have very little marketability.

Commercial producers now have more demands in buying replacements. They want their purchased cattle to come from single-source programs with known Angus genetics. They want to know about herd health programs. They're looking for an experienced breeder with a high-quality track record in the feedyard and on the rail.

I think commercial producers who seek out these types of cattle realize that they usually have to pay a little more for them up front. But, in the long run, they know there will be premiums paid. Producers are willing to pay for quality cattle because they know that when it comes time to merchandise the offspring and final product, consumers are ultimately willing to pay more at the meat counter for a higher-quality product.

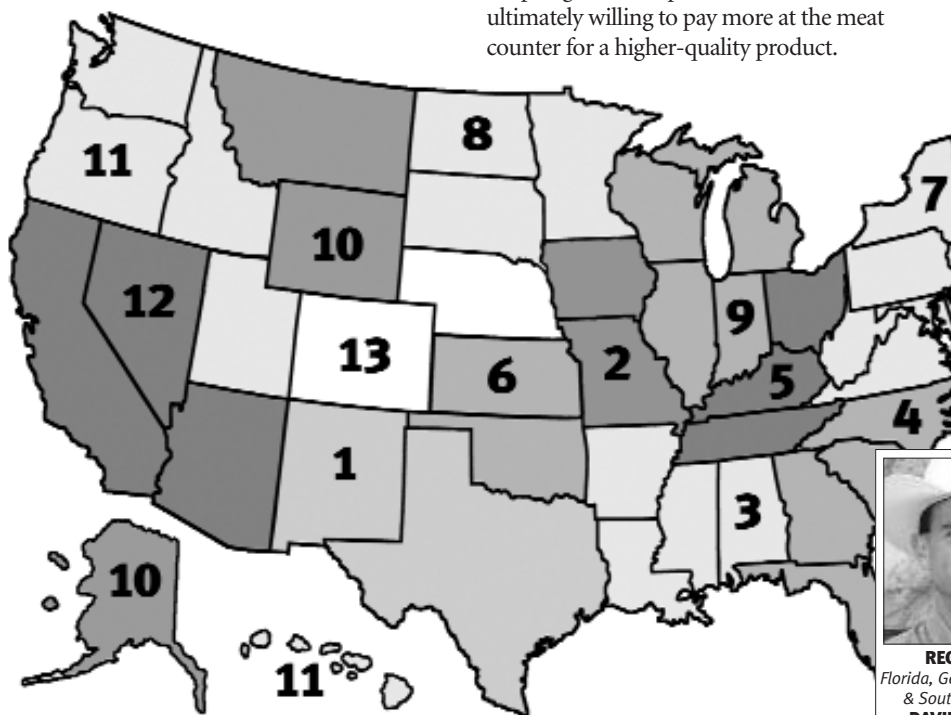
What is the ideal milk expected progeny difference (EPD), and how do producers determine what's best for them?

Gazda: The ideal milk EPD is one that allows calves to grow adequately and reach their genetic potential at weaning, while at the same time allowing cows to gain flesh, rebreed, lactate and stay sound from an udder-quality standpoint. It will vary from program to program, as it depends upon the environment, cow herd genetics and management levels.

Important questions to consider are, "Does your program need to retain replacement females?" Or, "Does your program focus more on terminally oriented traits?" In commercial herds using Angus bulls, it's also important to look at the maternal abilities of the cross used.

The Association's Optimal Milk Module is extremely valuable, because it allows producers to identify bulls that will complement their cow herd and management practices. The online module accomplishes this by analyzing producers' feed resources and mature cow size. The beauty of the module is that it allows producers to plug in numbers that are relevant to their program and receive customized results. You can access the

Optimal Milk Module by visiting www.angus.org/tools/optmilk/index.html.



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Pennsylvania
Virginia, West Virginia
DAVID MULLINS



REGION 4
Florida, Georgia, North
& South Carolina
DAVID GAZDA

In your opinion, what are the minimum qualifications for selecting a donor animal?

Gazda: A potential donor animal must be a proven producer with Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIRSM) data

documenting her production and that of her offspring, both from a performance and an ultrasound perspective. She must be structurally sound in terms of feet, legs and udder position.

She must also have a marketable pedigree. If you can't

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merchandise her offspring, then why multiply the genetics? I think it's important to look at this from a marketing standpoint, because we raise cattle to sell them.

I've seen producers have challenges flushing virgin heifers because they're difficult to get rebred and carry a natural calf. I advocate letting females calve at least once to prove they're worthy of being donors.

In herds wanting to use embryo transfer (ET) to expand their genetics, what cautions can you provide in selecting a cooperator herd?

Mullins: In my region, it seems like there is a continuously growing interest in raising ET calves through the use of cooperator herds. Some of the challenges breeders are facing are herd health issues, temperament problems and inadequate nutritional programs within the cooperator herds. I think it is important that the purebred producer provides a detailed contract for the cooperator herd manager that explains what the expectations are in reference to vaccination programs, potential creep-feeding situations, and a clear and concise method of payment. In addition, it is crucial for the provider of the embryos to inspect the recipient females for potential problems

such as bad teats, structural unsoundness and inadequate body condition scores (BCSs).

Gazda: Given the costs involved, I suggest selecting an experienced cooperator herd to ensure you get the best results. Do your homework, and follow up with others who have worked with them before.

If, after talking with others, you decide this herd is a good fit for your goals, the next step is to draw up a formal, written contract. Although it may be tedious, it is in everyone's best interest that the contract is specific and thorough. A good contract can eliminate a lot of problems down the road.

In addition to management terms, the contract should also clearly detail transfer and payment. One additional detail I often suggest breeders include in the contract is the designated waiting time until clean-up bulls will be turned out. You want a long enough wait time so you can easily differentiate ET calves from natural calves. If there is any question, a DNA test should be used.

Are cow energy values (\$EN) marketable in your area?

Mullins: \$EN is one of several very useful selection tools that producers have available to assist in the selection and/or marketing of

replacement females. Unfortunately, it appears to me that \$EN has drawn very little attention in my region. I believe that the most likely reason for this is because most of the breeders in my region have an abundance of feed and pasture resources. Therefore, it seems they have placed less emphasis on selecting females according to their ability to efficiently maintain an appropriate BCS.

Gazda: Like any other index value the Association releases, it tends to take a period of time before breeders become comfortable with the figures, so they can effectively apply them to their own programs. \$EN has a great value to both purebred and commercial producers in my region, because our southeastern environment allows us to grow some type of forage year-round. We are primarily a forage-based environment.

Since approximately 65% of cattle expenditures go toward feedstuffs, the ability for producers to identify sires and lines of cattle that excel in their ability to flesh, lactate, breed and develop in a forage-based environment with minimal supplements will dramatically decrease producers' production costs and hopefully improve their bottom lines. Ultimately, I believe you have to match the cow to the environment in which she is expected to work.



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