



For Granted

► by **Eric Grant**, API Creative Media manager

What traits pay?

Once in a while, a study comes along that has a great relevance to the Angus business. Ironically, one such study was conducted in 2006 by Colorado State University (CSU) for the Denver-based North American Limousin Foundation. It analyzed sale results of more than 2,500 Limousin and LimFlex bulls that were sold at auction or through private treaty in 2005 and 2006.

More than black, polled

Results showed that the top two traits that affected Limousin bull prices the most were polled and black. If a bull tested positive for the homozygous polled gene, it brought \$1,733 more per head than its horned counterparts. And, if a bull tested positive for the homozygous black gene, it brought \$843 more per head than its red counterparts.

CSU's Tom Field, who conducted the test, cautions producers not to add the two dollar amounts together, that the analysis looked at each specific trait and its own effect on value.

While the Angus breed possesses both homozygous polled and homozygous black in spades, there are other lessons of the research project that could create far-reaching opportunities for Angus producers in the future.

► **The importance of growth cannot be overlooked.** Bulls with the highest yearling and weaning weight expected progeny differences (EPDs) brought \$816 and \$685 more per head, respectively, than bulls in the lowest categories for these traits.

"Bull buyers still know that pounds pay, whether it's at weaning or at yearling," Field says. "Pounds still drive value more than carcass traits like quality or yield grade."

► **Artificial insemination (AI) pays — big time.** Bulls sired by AI brought \$402 more per head than bulls sired by natural service. The study indicates AI — which costs about \$50 per calf — is one of the most effective investments seedstock producers can make, researchers concluded. One of the researchers concluded that the quickest and easiest way for producers to add value to their production is to AI as many of their cows as they can to proven sires.

Apparently, Angus breeders already know this. Nearly 50% of all Angus registrations are calves sired by AI bulls. That's

significantly more than virtually all other breeds in the country.

► **Ultrasound scanning pays just by doing it.** Ultrasound-scanned bulls brought \$348 more per head than bulls that were not scanned. Just having the data available — not whether the data were necessarily good or bad — seemed to be the determining factor in the additional money it brought. Customers simply paid more for cattle that were ultrasound scanned.

► **Good dispositions pay.** Bulls with good docility EPDs brought \$340 more per head than bulls with poor docility EPDs.

Most breeds have taken it on the chin at one time or another when they didn't address their disposition problems and those problems got out of hand. The lesson here is

that bull customers reward production of quiet cattle, and producers who ignore it will lose economic advantages to those who take this lesson to heart.

► **Register your cattle.** Registered bulls brought \$400 more per head than unregistered bulls. Buyers apparently value the validation of associations standing behind the pedigrees and performance information of the bulls they're buying.

Breed associations have been built on the premise that registered cattle are simply worth more. That premise was true in the 1800s, when America's first breed associations formed, and it's true in the 21st century as Angus breeders move into new and unexplored opportunities.

The lessons of all these things are pretty clear: Angus breeders can't coast on their domination of the black and polled genes. If the market is driving production of increased numbers of black and polled cattle of all breeds, then price/value differentiations in the future could be determined even more significantly by other production traits, such as growth or docility.

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Editor's Note: "For Granted" is a monthly column written for the Angus Journal by Angus Production Inc.'s Creative Media manager Eric Grant. The column focuses on marketing beef, the beef industry and seedstock in particular — aspects of the business that are often taken for granted as day-to-day tasks take center stage.