

Live-animal session shows genomic application.

Story & photos by **Miranda Reiman**, *Certified Angus Beef LLC*

Angus cattle need to do more than ever before. Carcass quality, functional females, feedlot performance — they all matter. That theme was evident at the Innovation Workshops sponsored by Zoetis in the Priefert Cattle Demonstration Arena during the 2016 Angus Convention Nov. 5-7 in Indianapolis, Ind.

John Stika, president of the *Certified Angus Beef®* (CAB®) brand, talked of reaching the billion-pound sales milestone in fiscal year (FY) 2016.

“You won’t find a bigger fan of marbling than me, but the success of CAB is more than just marbling,” he said. It starts with a live, healthy calf and all the ranch-level moneymakers.

Stika recalled a producer once telling him about a high-quality carcass: “It’s the most valuable thing we produce, but it’s the last thing we get paid for,” the producer had shared.

That’s why it’s important to be sure cattle are “doing it all,” Stika said, while challenging the crowd to further the breed’s current momentum.

“We will not sell 2 billion pounds of *Certified Angus Beef* doing the exact same thing we did for the last 38 years,” he said. Employing all available technology is the logical path.

“The genomics will just become part of what we do. It won’t be special anymore,” Stephen Miller, director of genetic research for the American Angus Association, predicted.

In 2015, a quarter of all registered Angus cattle included DNA information. That data helps make expected progeny differences (EPDs) more accurate. Miller told the audiences how to use those measures to make progress while avoiding narrow selection.

Multi-trait progress

“The more traits we throw at the thing, the less progress you’re going to make in any one of them,” he said, noting that’s why indexes were created.

The scientist suggested using economically weighted values, such as weaned calf value (\$W) or beef value (\$B), to rank animals.

“Then we can look at different traits and structure and things like that,” he said.

Trends show cattlemen are making progress, as the breed average for \$B, carcass weights and marbling have trended up. At the same time, weaning weight has improved, while birth weight has decreased.

“Curve benders” have become more common, said Dan Shike, University of Illinois animal scientist.

“It used to be if you selected a calving-ease bull, you just had to accept that you were giving up other traits,” he said.

Curve benders are typically considered those with “relatively low birth weight as compared to weaning weight,” Kent Andersen, director of genetic technical services for Zoetis, explained. He and Shike evaluated live animals and then revealed their genomic data, talking through how it might change breeding recommendations.

“By testing, we front-load them with information so we can do a better job with mating,” Andersen said. It especially bolsters confidence on young sires. “We can jump-start accuracy.”

Live example

Adding the genomic data uncovered a “triple curve bender,” as Andersen called it, among the live animals on display. As OA Big Sky 305 came into the ring, the pair described his moderate birth weight. He was in the top 10% for weaning weight EPD, yet had the genetics to produce moderate daughters.

“We want rapid, efficient growth until a year of age, and then stop,” Shike said. “This breed has proven we can do that.”

The bull’s carcass traits made him a “triple,” with well-above-average carcass weight and marbling. He was in the top 20% for \$B.

Attendees were able to use text-polling to interact with the presenters. When Andersen asked them to select their favorite bull on both visual appraisal and the numbers, 305 was the clear choice, with 88% picking him.

Finding bulls to fit specific breeding goals can be as simple as using the “Sire Summary Search” on the Association’s website (www.angus.org), Andersen said. Producers can enter minimums and



► **Above:** “You won’t find a bigger fan of marbling than me, but the success of CAB is more than just marbling,” said John Stika. It starts with a live, healthy calf and all the ranch-level moneymakers.

► **Right:** Kent Andersen of Zoetis and Dan Shike of the University of Illinois discuss a bull’s phenotype and genotype with attendees of the Innovation Workshops sponsored by Zoetis at the 2016 Angus Convention. The session was intended to help lead cattle producers through the process of creating breeding plans.

maximums for all reported traits and narrow the report of prospective sires.

“It’s a powerful tool,” he said.

For additional coverage of the Angus Convention — including summaries, speaker presentations, photos, videos and more — visit the convention newsroom at www.angus.media/news/Angus-Convention.



Editor’s Note: *Miranda Reiman is assistant director of industry information for Certified Angus Beef LLC.*

Breaking Stereotypes

