

Making Great Mothers

MaternalPlus® allows Angus producers to add reproductive value to their herds and the Angus breed overall.

by *Katie Allen, Angus Foundation*

If you're in the cattle business, you've heard it time and again — the No. 1 profitability driver in the cow herd is reproduction.

While expected progeny differences (EPDs) have been developed through research data to aid producers in selecting for growth, carcass quality and some maternal characteristics, the American Angus Association continues to look for ways to make more selection tools available, particularly heifer pregnancy EPDs and other tools for cow longevity and reproductive efficiency.

To enhance current maternal EPDs and to develop additional selection tools would require more reproductive trait data collected on Angus females. This data would include heifer breeding records, calf records for each

female to monitor lifetime production and disposal codes that designate the reason a female was removed from the herd. The MaternalPlus program became the method to feed this database. It gives breeders the opportunity to collectively help advance reproductive selection in the Angus breed.



MaternalPlus is a voluntary inventory-based reporting system that is designed to capture reproductive trait data to expand reproductive and lifetime productivity selection tools. The program provides Angus

breeders and their customers the information they need to make effective selection decisions.

“The MaternalPlus program is the ideal way to report heifer breeding records,” says Sally Northcutt, Association director of

genetic research. “Another convenient benefit of MaternalPlus is the availability of calf EPDs for calving ease direct, birth weight and weaning weight, once the weaning data are processed through the Association. These selection tools are easily viewed through a participant's AAA Login account for use in preweaning selection and culling decisions even before calves are registered.”

Dalebanks Angus Ranch, Eureka, Kan., is one of more than 160 Angus herds currently enrolled in MaternalPlus.

“It's a huge opportunity for us as Angus breeders to simultaneously select for growth traits, end-product traits, calving ease — all of the things we've done for years,” Matt Perrier says. “But [we can] also focus on the No. 1 profitability driver, which is reproductive efficiency.”

The Perriers are no strangers to the Angus breed. Matt served on the American Angus Association staff, first as a regional manager



PHOTO COURTESY PERRIER FAMILY

► The Perrier family is no stranger to the Angus breed, and Matt Perrier says MaternalPlus will improve the marketability of Angus for seedstock and commercial producers alike due to understanding more about Angus cows' stayability and fertility.

How to enroll in MaternalPlus®

Enrolling in MaternalPlus is easy using AAA login.

If you are already familiar with AAA Login, you are well on your way to a streamlined enrollment. Fig. 1 illustrates the MaternalPlus menu tab. The menu tab provides program details to begin declaring the heifers and cows in your herd for the performance tracking. Once females are enrolled, breeders can continue to record their performance data through their typical methods, such as Login screens to submit data, spreadsheets, AIMS or other utilities.

Fig. 2 presents a view of the heifer inventory once enrollment is completed. In the example you will note that the first three heifers have had breeding records submitted, so their MaternalPlus requirements have been met, as checked in the last column, 'MPlus Requirements Met.' This summary tab lets you know where you stand relative to reporting information on your herd. The MaternalPlus logo appears on Login screens for active users in the program. You can use this logo in your marketing materials also.

The cow inventory summary is displayed in a similar format, as shown in Fig. 3. These example cows also have a listing of their last calf reported to the Association. It doesn't mean they have met the MaternalPlus requirement, but it provides you a reference point for that female. Again, the last column illustrates that these cows have met the program requirements.

MaternalPlus paves the way for selection tools related to cow longevity in the herd. For each cow, if a calf is not reported, a disposal code needs to be designated. Fig. 4 illustrates the menu for reporting that information.

Through data collection and feedback, MaternalPlus provides a new window to the cow herd and provides the opportunity for genetic improvement in female traits like the Angus breed has witnessed in other economically relevant traits.

To learn more about MaternalPlus basics and to enroll, go to your AAA Login account or contact the Association at 816-383-5100.

and then as director of commercial relations from 1997 to 2004, before returning to the operation. He and his father, Tom, a former Association Board member, strive to be progressive seedstock producers to meet the needs of their customers, who are mostly in the commercial business seeking Angus bulls.

Matt says MaternalPlus will improve the marketability of Angus for seedstock and commercial producers alike due to understanding more about Angus cows' stayability and fertility. Even though reproductive efficiency is a lowly heritable

Fig. 1: AAA Login Menu to begin MaternalPlus enrollment



Fig. 2: Heifer inventory summary after completed enrollment

The screenshot shows a table titled "Heifer Inventory" with columns for Cow ID, Dam, Birth Date, Last Breeding, Calf ID, Calf Birth Date, and MPlus Requirements Met. The first three rows show heifers with their requirements met, indicated by a checkmark in the last column.

Fig. 3: Cow inventory summary after completed enrollment

The screenshot shows a table titled "Cow Inventory" with columns for Cow ID, Dam, Birth Date, Last Breeding, Calf ID, Calf Birth Date, and MPlus Requirements Met. The first three rows show cows with their requirements met, indicated by a checkmark in the last column.

Fig. 4: Example of cow disposal details



trait, he says it is still important to examine it by collecting as much data as possible. Improving reproductive efficiency over time will pay off.

"If we can't achieve maximum profitability, our customers can't achieve maximum profitability on our bulls," Matt says. "It's a long-term proposition. Reproductive EPDs and the heritability estimates on these reproductive traits are fairly low. But so was calving ease, and look what we've done with calving ease in the Angus breed."

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With time and effort and more producers enrolling in the program to add to the database, MaternalPlus can help the Angus breed show its maternal focus and have the data to support it.

“To provide selection tools, you have to have data,” Tom Perrier says. “We need people to enroll in the MaternalPlus program. It’s voluntary, but we need people to enroll so we can track cows, why we dispose of them, which ones are getting bred and which ones aren’t. Also in that is mature weights, frame size and condition scores.”

The Perriers say MaternalPlus requires producers to take a little more time to collect data on females and enter it into the online system, but time put into the program will show other Angus breeders and commercial customers that the Angus breed is continuing to make progress and drive profitability for all.



Editor’s Note: *Katie Allen is director of marketing and public relations for the Angus Foundation.*

Supporting the Angus Foundation

In addition to using the latest tools and programs made available by the American Angus Association, the Perriers also know that sustaining the Angus breed requires some effort to support the Angus Foundation and its youth, education and research activities.

Tom Perrier says in its initial years, the Angus Foundation only supported the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) Board, but growth in endowments and financial support from donors of all sizes has expanded the support tremendously to positively impact more people.

“It’s important to have not just one focus,” Tom says. “Not just scholarships, and not just the national junior board, but it (Foundation) is helping in lots of different ways in expanding research, expanding communications and expanding educational opportunities. A lot of people can be touched and helped by it.”

Tom and his wife, Carolyn, witnessed the Foundation support firsthand when their children were involved in NJAA programs and attended the National Junior Angus Show.

“I have always been amazed at the leadership activities that I saw in the junior Angus program, and, of course, it’s developed so much more from where it was when my children were in it 15 and 20 years ago,” Carolyn says. “It’s just amazing to see what they can do for young people, and I think it benefits so many kids.”

Tom says when he was on the American Angus Association Board of Directors, he was able to witness the expansion of Angus Foundation support even more.

“I thought it was extremely important that we communicate and help educate our membership more about what’s going on and the tools available. The Foundation gives that opportunity,” Tom says. “The Association has always funded some sort of research, but (the Foundation) expands that capability. Government support of research has been on the decline for years and years, and it looks like it’s probably not going to be expanded. So we may have to do some things ourselves.”

Tom adds that every little bit given to the Angus Foundation helps.

“We can give a little every year, and we can sign up for the (Angus Platinum Visa®) credit card, and there’s maybe some event that the Foundation is a part of we can go to or contribute to in some manner,” Tom says. “There are a lot of different opportunities. It all adds up.”

