



Field Notes

► by **Matt Caldwell, Vern Frey and Rod Wesselman**, regional managers, American Angus Association

Zeroing in on carcass traits

American Angus Association regional managers offer insight about how producers are utilizing carcass data.

How can seedstock producers establish carcass histories on their cattle?

Vern Frey: One way to establish carcass history is to collect actual data when progeny of herd bulls are harvested. This process is time-consuming, and obtaining data can sometimes be frustrating. Working with alliances or commercial producers who feed and sell on the grid would be quite helpful.

Cattle need to be identified and followed very closely through feedlots and packing companies. The key to collecting carcass data in this manner is to know when and where cattle will be identified and harvested. You have to be persistent. Your dedication will benefit your operation and your customers'.

With national identification (ID) coming, this data collection method could again become more popular and feasible. The number of head on which actual carcass data was collected and submitted to the Association was up about 5,000 head in 2004 compared to the previous year.

Ultrasound, which was initiated in 1998,

has become very popular in securing carcass history. Because so much data can be collected on an individual sire from several different herds, producers can get a very good idea of how his progeny will perform.

In 2004, the number of cattle for which ultrasound scans were submitted to the American Angus Association was up 13%. The Spring 2005 National Cattle Evaluation (NCE) included data on more than 400,000 animals, generating 756,932 expected progeny differences (EPDs).

Rod Wesselman: The fastest way to accumulate carcass information and data for seedstock producers is through ultrasound. It is a great opportunity for seedstock producers to collect data and to share carcass EPDs with customers who are buying bulls and females. Carcass data is one tool that can advance your herd and your customers' herds in a timely manner.

Carcass evaluation testing with steer progeny can also be an avenue for seedstock producers. This method will take more time to establish EPDs. You need to have a commercial herd to randomly mate to the sires and

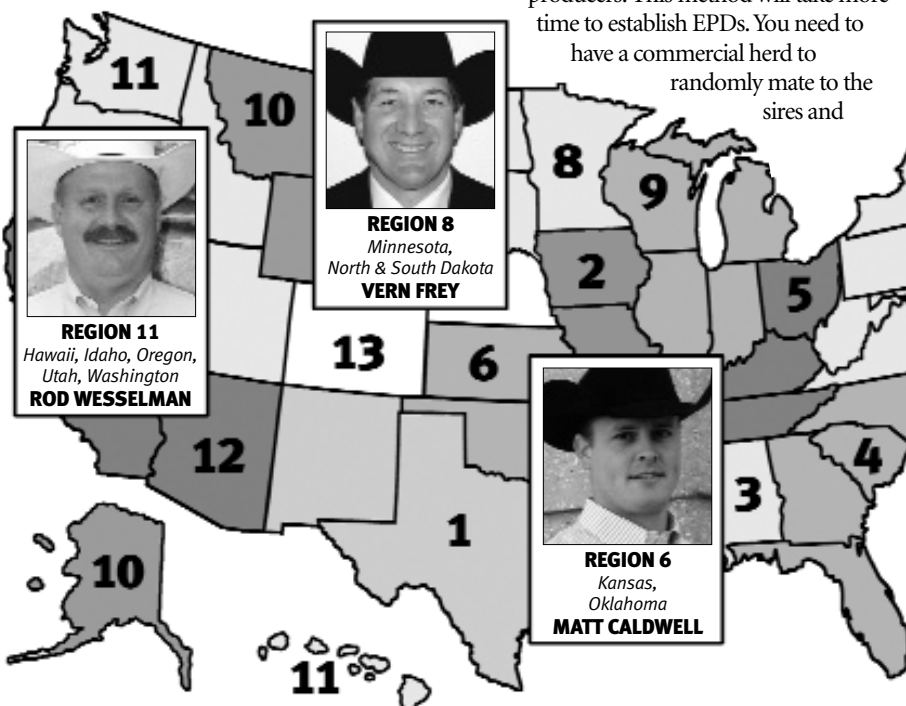
reference sires. The time from breeding the cows to collecting the data of steer progeny at harvest can be 2½ to 3 years.

Are commercial producers in your area using carcass information when buying Angus bulls?

Matt Caldwell: More commercial producers every year are using EPDs for carcass merit to make bull-buying decisions. They are realizing that even if they don't retain ownership on calves, end-product merit is important. The buyers of their calves will keep records of which cattle work and which don't. Simple tools such as Grid Value (\$G) are available through the American Angus Association to utilize in multi-trait selection for end-product merit. Utilizing these tools will also open doors for commercial producers to add value to replacement females.

Frey: As commercial producers become more familiar with carcass data, we're seeing them utilize the information to buy bulls. However, the EPDs and/or \$Value indexes they concentrate on are dependent on their marketing plan. According to questions I have received, intramuscular fat (IMF) and ribeye area (REA) EPDs seem to be the most popular. Pluses in these two categories are a must for producers. The producers who feed to background are looking at Feedlot Value (\$F), while the producers who sell on the grid focus on \$G and Beef Value (\$B).

Wesselman: Commercial producers in the Northwest are using carcass information more each year. When carcass EPDs aren't listed in a sale book, commercial producers ask me where the information is or if any data has been collected on the seedstock herd. That indicates to me that commercial producers are using carcass information. The commercial producers who retain their steers and heifers to harvest are the ones who are utilizing carcass EPDs most often. There is a small percentage of commercial producers who are still trying to learn how to utilize carcass information. For producers wanting to learn more, I recommend they utilize the Sire Evaluation Report at www.angussiresearch.com or put in a request for the printed version by contacting



the Performance Programs Department at (816) 383-5100.

In what carcass figures are commercial producers most interested?

Caldwell: Commercial bull buyers are most interested in ultrasound EPDs and \$B. Producers who sell calves at weaning are using the \$B value as a multi-trait selection tool to build value in their feeder calves. Commercial producers who have carcass data and feedlot performance available on their cattle can analyze which traits need improvement and use individual ultrasound EPDs. Never before have producers been able to make such drastic improvement in carcass traits and still keep all other economically important traits in balance.

Wesselman: I believe individual ultrasound EPDs are the most utilized carcass figures. Commercial producers are looking at marbling and REA EPDs. If the producer is retaining ownership on calves and knows more specifically what he needs to improve, that producer will use the carcass EPDs in many different ways. As time goes on and commercial producers learn more about the \$G and \$B values, these figures will be used by many more producers.

Are seedstock producers in your area helping commercial producers establish carcass histories? And, if so, does that figure into their success in merchandising Angus bulls?

Frey: I would estimate 80% of seedstock producers in this region who are having production sales are collecting ultrasound data on bulls and heifers. Those breeders who have good IMF EPDs and REA EPDs are seeing results on the positive side when merchandising their bulls. The more involved seedstock producers are with their customers, the more successful they seem to be. Those who help merchandise their customers' calves or help obtain data certainly seem to be rewarded.

Realizing each operation is unique, are there areas that the Angus breed should improve upon in general?

Caldwell: The Angus breed is experiencing phenomenal demand.

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However, there is still a tremendous amount of opportunity. Seedstock producers who are not turning in breeding records to the Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR) program need to do so. Turning in breeding records should become as routine as submitting a birth or weaning weight. When commercial bull buyers have reproductive EPDs available through the Association, along with Weaned Calf Value (\$W) and \$B, they will have the complete beef production picture.

Frey: Two areas that are starting to surface, although not a serious problem at this time, are structural problems with feet and legs and fertility.

Wesselman: There are a few seedstock producers in the Northwest who are working

with commercial customers to collect carcass information on their herds. Seedstock producers are purchasing their customers' steers and heifers to follow them through to harvest, which in return gives them an opportunity to collect carcass data. I believe this is a win-win opportunity for both commercial and seedstock producers to identify needed improvements in their genetics basis. This creates longtime customers for the seedstock producers. Seedstock producers can't do this for every customer every year, but it is a tremendous way to build trust and alliances with their customers.

