



Along the Trail

► by **Dan Green**, "Along the Angus Trail" author

Genetic testing

Along America's Angus Trails is taking note this week of the dramatic increase in genetic testing of sires. The American Angus Association says fewer than 1% of its registered sires were genetically tested as recently as 2010, while this year the figure will be more like 20%.

Growing trend

This is significant, if for no reason other than some two-thirds of commercial cattle ranchers in the United States now say that their cow herds include animals with Angus genes.

Angus breeder Mark Gardiner of Ashland, Kan., has his bulls DNA-profiled by a gene-testing firm and can now tell from birth how many pounds they are likely to

gain per day and how much rich, marbled beef their carcasses will yield.

Proponents describe the genetic measurement tools as *Moneyball* meets *Bonanza*. Gardiner says, "It helps give a producer a higher batting average."

In fact, the American Angus Association is in the forefront of the genetic-testing movement, now maintaining a database with the largest breed-specific beef cattle statistics

in the world, according to Tonya Amen, genetic service director at Angus Genetics Inc., a unit of the Association that evaluates cattle DNA. It now contains detailed DNA results for about 100,000 beef cattle.

The data bank added 11,756 head in 2012, 38,988 head in 2013 and 57,550 in 2014.

I'm not just some shill for the American Angus Association. All this data came from the front-page story in a recent issue of

the *Wall Street Journal*, the bible of American commerce and industry.

Soaring cattle prices have helped fuel investment in beef genetics research. The U.S. cattle herd has dwindled to its smallest size in 60 years, after sustained drought in the southern Great Plains parched pastures and drove up feed costs. Tight supplies of steers and heifers have meant record prices for young beef cattle in the United States



and retail beef prices climbed 12%-14% in 2014 alone.

That's why some cattlemen are paying about \$100 per head for the genetic testing, which typically consists of shipping off a blood sample to a lab. The question comes down to, "Will it be worth it?"

Meatpackers like Cargill and Tyson Foods, the world's largest meatpacker by sales, say the technology could help them keep pace with changing consumer preferences for different sorts of meat.

Says Donnie Smith, Tyson president, "If consumer demand for more high-quality, more marbled beef is what we'll see in the future, the market will react to that and move that way."

It's encouraging to see that some in the cattle industry, like the American Angus Association, will be ready, willing and able to provide that.

Editor's Note: *Dan Green is a Denver-based historian, author, retired editor of the The Record Stockman and the voice of "Along America's Angus Trails," a regular feature on Angus Media's SiriusXM satellite radio program, Angus Talk. Angus Talk airs at 10 a.m., Central time, every Saturday on Rural Radio, Channel 80.*

Angus convention to host international genomics symposium

The American Angus Association and Angus Genetics Inc. (AGI) will host an international genomics symposium as part of the 2015 Angus Means Business National Convention & Trade Show. The event will be Nov. 3 in Overland Park, Kan., and will provide cattle producers with cutting-edge information about advancements in genomics technology and how these advances affect their businesses.

The symposium is sponsored by GeneSeek, a leading provider of comprehensive genomics solutions to the cattle industry, including the GeneSeek Genomic Profiler (GGP-HD).

"We are excited about the symposium and what it will mean for the cattle business," says Dan Moser, AGI president. "Genomics is rapidly reshaping the way we produce livestock, and providing producers with the best information available will not only help us improve quality and consistency, but also make our industry more competitive."

Genomics researcher and entrepreneur Richard Resnick will be the event's keynote speaker. Resnick serves as CEO of GenomeQuest, a company that builds software to support genomic medicine, research and individualized treatments. Before becoming a bio-entrepreneur, Resnick was a member of the Human Genome Project at the Massachusetts Institute of

Technology (MIT). Resnick will be one of several widely acclaimed experts on genomics technology to be speaking at the event.

"GeneSeek has partnered with the Angus breed since 2009, and our sponsorship of the symposium is a natural extension of our long-standing commitment to the breed and the cattle industry," says Stewart Bauck, general manager of GeneSeek/Neogen Agrigenomics. "There is intense interest among cattle producers about genomics, and this event will go a long way in serving GeneSeek's mission not only to advance the use of genomics technology, but also show the positive impacts it will have on producers."

The rise of genomic testing and evaluation is reshaping the Angus business at an accelerating pace. In fiscal year 2014, genomic testing increased by 32%, and AGI recently reported that genomic testing in the first quarter of fiscal year 2015 grew by more than 56%.

The 2015 Angus Means Business National Convention & Trade Show will be Nov. 3-5 at the Overland Park Convention Center in Overland Park, Kan. The first-ever convention last year attracted nearly 2,000 producers from across the country. For more information about the convention, visit www.angus.org.

— by **Jena McReil**, digital editor