



Angus Stakes

► by *Shauna Rose Hermel*, editor

Get to know your customers

Understanding your customers is a core tenet to good business. As Keith Evans has pointed out in his column in so many ways, retaining customers is much easier than finding new ones. And the key to retaining customers is to meet their needs — both with the product you sell and the service that comes with that product. But how often do you take the time to ask your customers what they will want in a bull three years from now?

Thinking forward

We often preach to commercial cattlemen the need to think down the road. The cows they breed in summer 2005 will calve in spring 2006, and those calves won't go to market until summer or fall 2007. Their herd mates saved as replacements won't calve until spring 2008.

But thinking forward is also needed when raising seedstock. The cows you breed in spring 2005 will calve in winter 2006. Herd bull prospects from this calf crop won't be ready for turnout until spring or possibly even fall 2007. Do you have a handle on what your customers will need in a bull?

If you assume all commercial producers want is a low-birth-weight bull that's polled and black, you may miss the boat.

Bulletin readers polled

In the October 2004 issue, we polled *Angus Beef Bulletin* readers as to their bull-buying and management practices. Turn to page 124 for a more detailed report of the results, but I want to pull a few things out for discussion — specifically responses to the questions regarding what commercial producers would like 1) their seedstock suppliers and 2) the American Angus Association to provide in terms of products and services.

The responses in Table 1 on page 125 show a desire for seedstock producers to supply more marketing options and more information regarding both the health status and the performance of their cattle. Only one producer mentioned calving ease. Now, I know as well as you that when producers come to the ranch they do ask to see birth weights and birth weight expected progeny differences (EPDs). I think it's safe to speculate that an emphasis on calving ease is considered a given when purchasing an Angus bull. But, in the survey, *Angus Beef Bulletin* readers indicated they are looking for much more than just a calving-ease bull.

As shown in Table 2 on page 126,

commercial producers clearly indicated they look to the Association, often through the *Angus Beef Bulletin*, as a source of information. And it's clear they want more information — more information about EPDs, herd health and management, marketing, and industry.

While one producer indicated a desire for less paperwork, not one respondent asked for less information or fewer numbers on which to base genetic decisions. In fact, it was just the opposite; they asked for more complete information, translation of what raw data mean and specific EPDs.

Granted, these *Angus Beef Bulletin* readers would appear to be more advanced in their management levels than the national average. They are likely to be customers for a good long while, providing they can find the seedstock supplier(s) who will provide them the quality cattle, information, service after the sale and marketing options they desire.

Are you ready?

Are you prepared to be one of the seedstock suppliers to whom they turn? Seedstock producers in other breeds envy the resources and the programs you've built through the American Angus Association. Can you leverage them to your full advantage? Do you provide the complete health and EPD information your buyers are asking for? Can you explain the AngusSourceSM program and how it adds value by documenting Angus (not just black) genetics as well as health and management protocols? Do you transfer your bulls so customers get EPD updates and the *Angus Beef Bulletin*? Are you taking time to visit your customers' herds to understand what they have and need?

Or are you just trying to sell what you've got in the pen?

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