

Angus Stakes

► by *Shauna Rose Hermel*, editor

Always looking to improve

More than 350 cattlemen, academia and allied industry representatives gathered in Athens, Ga., May 31-June 3 for the 2017 Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) Research Symposium and Convention. Current use and the future potential of genomics in beef cattle evaluations took center stage in the program's opening general session.

Improving the models

Daniela Lourenco of the University of Georgia gave an overview of how genetic evaluations have changed over the years, culminating with the rollout of the single-step methodology that the industry is in the process of adopting. Together with Keith Bertrand and Ignacy Misztal, Lourenco helped author the software that the American Angus Association intends to deploy this summer to run its national cattle evaluation.

At its heart, the single-step analysis provides a better way to incorporate genomic information into genetic evaluations.

Dairy has led the way with incorporating genomics into genetic evaluations. Tom Lawlor of the Holstein Association USA shared the dairy experience and how genomic evaluations have changed their business.

"The growth in the investment in dairy cattle genetics has led to an increased desire to protect that investment and control the distribution of its product," he provided in

his proceedings paper. "Using the top genetics, early and exclusively, within one's own nucleus breeding program and then selling sexed-sorted semen is a strategy that some studs have implemented."

It is creating a widening gap between "the haves" and "the have nots," Lawlor said. He shared how genomic selection is affecting breeding programs and business structure within the dairy industry.

Matt Spangler of the University of Nebraska and Alison Van Eenennaam of the University of California–Davis took on the challenge of looking to the future and what technologies offer promise for genomic selection and breed improvement.

The PowerPoints and proceedings papers for all three presentations are available in the Newsroom at www.bifconference.com, Angus Media's online coverage of the event. I would encourage Angus breeders to spend some time exploring those presentations and listening to the audio, which should be posted by publication.

These presentations provide good background for Stephen Miller's later discussion on single step. In a technical breakout session, Miller, who is director of genetic research for the American Angus Association, explained the Association's current progress in converting from the current two-step model to single step to power its national cattle evaluation.

Miller announced that single step will be deployed July 7, the same evaluation that will be used to print the biannual *Fall 2017 American Angus Association Sire Evaluation Report*.

We share an overview of his comments in this month's "By the Numbers" column (see page 47). The PowerPoint and audio for his presentation are available in the Newsroom at www.bifconference.com.

"Better is always different, but different is not always better," Miller noted, and the AGI team has been running the evaluation comparing the current two-step methodology to the single step for the last six months. Single step has proven itself a better technology, providing more accurate genetic predictions, Miller shared.

The change will be noticeable. There will be re-rankings, but rest assured, it is a better evaluation. Kudos to the AGI team for continuing the Angus advance by improving the tools by which we evaluate Angus cattle. What we had was the best in the beef industry. The new analysis will be even better.



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Angus Journal

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