



Halfway around the world and seemingly worlds apart, the Angus breed's birthplace and the "Land of Oz" differ in a major way. Half of the island continent's beef cattle live in the subtropical climate zone, which makes it vastly different than the highlands of Scotland. Yet, Angus cattle can thrive in a land where kangaroos are as common as whitetail deer.

With Angus being the biggest breed in both countries, the American and Australian Angus associations have many similarities, despite their differences in opportunities and challenges. Advancement in genetic testing, marketing and youth programs are similar in both countries, yet environmental and market challenges are disparate.

Setting the scene

While the countries are relatively similar in size, they differ incredibly in arable land and population. The World Bank says Australia has 6.1% arable land, while the United States has 17.1%. Australia has a population of 23.13 million, according to the World Bank in 2013, contrasting with the 316.5 million who call the United States home.

The northern half of Australia is in the subtropics, so heat tolerance, drought resistance and pest resistance are major objectives for many Australian cattlemen. Peter Parnell, Angus Australia CEO, says a major goal of the Society is to increase crossbreeding with Angus cattle in the north

Angus Down Under

Angus Society of Australia offers resources to help breeders with unique challenges and opportunities.

by Kasey Brown, associate editor



to assist *Bos indicus* cattle with fertility and carcass quality.

Bos indicus cattle are naturally more suited for the hot, harsh terrain of northern Australia, but their markets changed drastically four years ago and are still recovering. Exporting live *Bos indicus* cattle to Indonesia was a major trade force for Australians, yet in 2011, when footage of an Indonesian abattoir (or as we call them, packing plants) raised issues of animal welfare and food safety, the Australian Parliament halted all live exports.

Several Australians grimly say that the government's "knee-jerk" decision forced many Australian cattlemen out of business. Since then, relations with Indonesia have been shaky, though trade has resumed. However, that was a wake-up call for Australians to diversify markets, and the Angus Society jumped at the chance to show how Angus cattle can provide quality eating experiences for both domestic and international markets.

Australia's grading system, Meat Standards Australia (MSA), increases relevance in domestic markets. According to MSA's website, www.beefandlamb.com/au, the system was developed by 100,000 consumers who tasted and rated 700,000 beef and lamb samples to identify key factors in providing enjoyable eating experiences every time.

To earn the MSA grade, considerations include meat color; pH, or acidity; marbling;

age; and weight of the animal. Other considerations are breed, nutrition, and welfare and handling of the animals. All within the beef and lamb production cycles are licensed and audited to earn the MSA grade symbol.

Parnell says MSA is a great way to market the benefits of Angus beef, as is the Society's subsidiary, Certified Angus Group. For northern producers, Angus cattle can cross with *Bos indicus* cattle to increase fertility and meat quality, and they can increase safety and ease management with polledness. Slick hair coats are hereditary, and by selecting slick Angus cattle to breed in the north, cattle perform better. Additionally, acclimating Angus bulls in the winter months and letting them adapt as temperatures heat up helps.

International markets also play a large role in the Australian beef industry. A robust national traceability program helps give credibility and gain access to many markets, especially in Asia.

Feedlots are gaining popularity in eastern and southern Australia, especially because they are closer to larger populations and closer to cereal grains. Parnell says in the temperate climate of south Australia, Angus is the preferred breed.

Angus uniformity

In addition to the cattle advantages themselves, Australian Angus cattlemen have many resources at their disposal through Angus Australia.

The organization was established in 1919 and is the largest beef breed association in Australia. With only half of the continent in the temperate zone, the Society serves more than 3,500 members nationwide. Approximately 1,000 of those members are seedstock breeders, and the Society offers different levels of membership at different price points for commercial cattlemen.

A commercial membership offers access to export certification, weekly Angus electronic bulletins or hard copy bulletins, access to online sale catalogs, advertising on the Angus Australia website and hard-copy publications, and access to member-only documents.

A full Angus Australia membership includes the benefits of the commercial membership, but also includes access to registration of Angus and Angus-influenced cattle, Angus Breedplan recording and use of Angus Quality Assured Catalogue Services.

Like the American Angus Association, genetic analysis and improvement is a high priority



► Angus Australia employees Andrew Byrne (above left) and Peter Parnell (below) speak with Angus breeders at the 2015 Beef Australia expo.



► Angus Australia is the largest beef breed association in Australia and serves 3,500 members.

for Angus Australia. The Society provides efficient female inventories for registered animals and, most importantly, offers economic importance through their Angus Breedplan genetic evaluation tools.

Christian Duff, Angus Australia's strategic projects manager, explains that Angus Breedplan is an advanced genetic evaluation system that provides a genetic description of Angus cattle for a comprehensive range of traits influencing fertility, growth and carcass performance. It produces estimated breeding values (EBVs) monthly for Angus breeders.

EBVs are defined as an estimate of an animal's own genetic value for a particular trait, whereas the expected progeny differences (EPDs) used in North America are an animal's genetic value as a parent for a particular trait.

In addition to Angus Breedplan EBVs, Duff says they also have a large progeny test scheme called the Angus Sire Benchmarking Program. This program evaluates 30-40 young bulls each year, bred to 2,000-2,500 females using fixed-time artificial insemination (FTAI) within five to seven large cooperator herds. The steer progeny go to feedlots to collect feed efficiency data. They are fed for 270 days and also get carcass data from the abattoirs. Heifer progeny are evaluated for first- and second-parity breeding performance. The program will conduct its sixth cohort mating in 2015, with more than 160 bulls already evaluated.

There are three major goals for these progeny tests. Duff says, "We want to test the genetic quality of these bulls in real-world situations. We want to build big databases that enable the derivation of genomic relationships, and we want to evaluate the progeny for difficult-to-measure traits such as net feed intake, meat quality and female fertility."

Education of Angus Australia's members on how to best use genetic evaluation services

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is part of Andrew Byrne's job. Byrne is Angus Australia's education, extension and youth manager. Angus Australia provides selection index values on all recorded animals. Byrne says that Angus Australia recently completed a comprehensive review of the underlying economic assumptions underpinning the indexes. Feedback from breeders indicated that they wanted more emphasis on maternal performance and meat quality in the indexes, and this was factored into the revisions.

Byrne says there has been greater

acceptance of indexes, and that breeders now have more comfort in using them. By consulting breeders before redeveloping them, he says that has increased acceptance.

In addition to providing genetic data, Angus Australia also helps with marketing Angus cattle through the production of online sale books and offering member advertising through their website and publications. Advertising on the Society's website garners more than 40,000 hits a month to a targeted audience.

Byrne says that another important aspect of Angus Australia is its vibrant youth program, Angus Youth. It is one of the largest youth breed organizations in the country and offers opportunities through shows, educational contests, leadership seminars, ambassador and mentoring programs, scholarship opportunities and more.

Ever humble, each Society staff member says they do not want to rest on their laurels and will keep their focus on continuous improvement. 