



# By the Numbers

► by **Kelli Retallick**, AGI director of genetic service

## Long live the Angus female

*Operation profitability depends on several different factors, but one could argue cow longevity, or how long a female stays in the herd, plays one of the largest roles in defining a producer's bottom line. Early removal of young females decreases profits due to lost developmental costs; increased depreciation costs; and lower productivity of young, genetically superior females. It is important to be able to detect females that will remain in herds longer. Breeding and disposal records collected through the MaternalPlus® program, provided through the American Angus Association, will allow for genetic predictors of such traits to be analyzed. However, in order to get to that point, Association members must take an active participation role in the program.*

### What is MaternalPlus?

The MaternalPlus program is a voluntary whole-herd inventory-based program allowing breeders to report reproductive-trait data and cow records to the Association. In this whole-herd system, a producer will pay on a per cow basis rather than per calf. Each cow is charged a \$3 annual enrollment fee, which then replaces her calf's Angus Herd Improvement Record (AHIR®) weaning weight processing fee.

Requirements of the program include heifer breeding records and, for mature inventoried females, calf records (weight, preweaning or disposal code) and/or disposal or reason codes for each female. For example, if a female is used as a donor dam in the current year, a reason code will be assigned to the individual so she is not incorrectly disadvantaged for a missed natural calf.

Breeders can enroll in the program at any time and will have a corresponding re-enrollment date each year thereafter. If, down the road, a producer decides there is a better time period to maintain and update his or her cow inventory, the Association will work with producers on an individual basis to make changes. After initial enrollment, which needs to be issued through AAA Login, Angus Information Management Software (AIMS) users can continue to report cow records in the same manner as they do currently.

### Why whole-herd reporting?

Using a whole-herd approach allows for better prediction of expected progeny differences (EPDs) because the Association obtains information on every cow and her calf's performance. Increasing the number of breeding records means better prediction for traits such as the heifer pregnancy (HP)

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EPD, which is the probability of a sire's daughters to get pregnant as first-calf heifers. More records allow us to better explain the genetic variation of this trait, which increases prediction accuracy and the value of genomic data. Additional collection of reproductive trait data will allow for further selection tools to be produced, perhaps a cow longevity EPD or a more sophisticated maternal index.

### What are immediate benefits?

Other than increased prediction accuracy of HP EPDs, producers enrolled in the program will receive calving ease, birth weight and weaning weight EPDs at weaning weight processing time. Currently, producers not in MaternalPlus need to register animals before any EPDs are provided. MaternalPlus enrollees will be able to make further culling decisions before investing in registration.

Enrollees also receive genetic trend reports allowing producers to put their herd head-to-head against the entire Angus population for each individual trait. Additional reports include weaning weight sire summaries, calf death loss and body condition score (BCS)



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summaries, and dam disposal reports. All reports aid producers in making both better selection and management decisions by identifying herd strengths and weaknesses and benchmarking herds against the entire Angus database.

### Why now?

The American Angus Association is the only major breed association that does not have a mandatory or semi-mandatory whole-herd reporting structure and, in turn, lacks any sort of cow longevity or stayability prediction tool. While Association members are applauded and committed to providing performance records on individual progeny, reproductive data is lacking. In order for the Angus cow to remain the industry leader, reproductive data must be collected and quantified to aid in selecting the most efficient and reproductively sound individuals possible.

Currently, approximately 35,000 cows are enrolled in MaternalPlus. That's a healthy starting point, but with registrations exceeding 320,000 annually in recent years, much more data is available to be quantified.

The MaternalPlus program is aimed at increasing the validity of current predictions and aid in defining new selection tools for breeders and their commercial customers. Stay ahead of the curve and get enrolled today. For more information on the MaternalPlus program, please contact any member of the Performance Programs team.

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