



By the Numbers

► by *Nicole Lane*, guest columnist

MaternalPlus®: What's it worth?

The maternal traits of the Angus cow are what made the breed famous, and a good cow herd is the backbone to a profitable operation. However, selecting for maternal traits in the cow herd hasn't been easily quantifiable — until now.

Surprising insights

MaternalPlus® is a voluntary, inventory-based reporting system designed to capture additional reproductive trait data and, ultimately, expand reproductive and lifetime productivity tools. The eventual goal is to create a cow longevity expected progeny difference (EPD).

Angus producers have been using MaternalPlus since its introduction in 2012, but not all have taken advantage of the voluntary program. During the Angus Means Business National Convention & Trade Show in Overland Park, Kan., this past November, Richard Tokach of Tokach Angus, Saint Anthony, N.D., and Matt Perrier of Dalebanks Angus, Eureka, Kan., shared how MaternalPlus has helped improve their herds.

Tokach said he chose MaternalPlus for purely economic reasons.

“Any successful operation has to have a good cow herd, and we spend a lifetime

building one, but how do we measure it?” he asked. “MaternalPlus allows me to do a better job selecting things that make a better cow herd for ourselves and everyone in the breed.”

Tokach shared that after using MaternalPlus, he was shocked to learn where his operation was losing calves. He discovered the North Dakota weather was having more of a negative impact on his profitability than he estimated and realized better management practices were needed.

The biggest benefit of using MaternalPlus has been receiving the EPDs without registering all his calves, said Tokach, explaining that it allowed him to make selection decisions earlier and more accurately.

Selecting for multiple traits

Perrier said he believes that through the data MaternalPlus provides, the Angus breed can spread genetics to create high-performing cattle that are reproductively efficient.

“I am confident that with enough data in reproductive traits we can select for cattle that do everything our customers want and still breed on low to moderate inputs at the ranch level,” he said.

Perrier also explained that the data for why each animal left his herd (recorded as disposal codes) is as valuable to him as birth weight, weaning weight or marbling EPDs. The knowledge this data has given him has made his team better herd managers.

“You can't manage what you don't measure,” said Perrier. “We can run an advertisement saying that the Angus cow is efficient, but I don't think we can continue to say that because she's easy-fleshing she is an efficient member of our cow herd. We've got to have data to prove it.”

The program recently added benefits such as access to the MaternalPlus logo, sale book inserts and customizable MaternalPlus advertisements to market that a herd has been using the program.

Tips for enrolling

First-calf heifers can be enrolled for free in the program, and cows cost \$3 per cow per year. The \$3 fee replaces the Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR®) weaning weight fee that would be submitted instead. Breeders can use the exact same data-entry system they have been using. All producers need to do is click “yes” to being involved in MaternalPlus and then clean up the cow herd data.

Angus Genetics Inc. (AGI) Genetic Service Director Tonya Amen reminded producers that Association staff are available to help get started with MaternalPlus and welcomed suggestions on how to improve the program.

“It was a no-brainer to get involved,” said Tokach. “We all want to get ahead of the next guy, and this is a tool to use to do that. If you don't want to use it, that's fine, but if your neighbors are using it and you're not, who's ahead?”



Editor's Note: Tokach and Perrier discussed their experiences with MaternalPlus during a workshop at the Angus Means Business National Convention & Trade Show in Overland Park, Kan., Nov. 3-5. This guest column is taken from the Angus Journal's coverage of the event, which is available in total online at www.angusjournal.com/NCnTS/2015/index.html. Visit the site to access a link to the audio of the presentation. Nicole Lane is a former Angus Journal intern.