By the Numbers

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Working from the ground up

Just like a house needs a solid foundation to last for years, beef cattle need a solid foot to avoid being culled early due to structural issues. In 2014, the Association started accepting foot scores in hopes of helping members identify and select away from animals with presumed issues. Since then, members have recorded approximately 7,500 phenotypes for the cause.

The data

The Association and its members are off to a great start when it comes to foot scoring. However, it is not only the quantity of data that aids in calculating an accurate selection tool, but also the availability of phenotypes across different ages within the population. It is important to remember that taking foot scores at yearling data collection time is the first opportunity for producers to record scores, but it is just as important to score older females in the herd.

Scores on older animals allow for a better understanding of the variation of foot types in the Angus population. Foot problems may not be expressed in animals when they are just a year old; therefore, it is important to examine older females to fully understand if a problem is present.

With that, multiple scores can be taken and are encouraged on animals year after year. Taking only one score on each individual only gives a snapshot in time, while repeated measures allow us to analyze which animals maintain solid footing or get significantly worse with age.

The process

Two scores — claw set and foot angle — are advised for collection (see Figs. 1 and 2). Problems with these two areas have been shown to affect soundness. Both scores are based on a 1-to-9 scale with 5 being ideal for both traits.

For claw set, a 5 depicts toes that are basically straight and symmetrical; whereas, animals with widely open and divergent toes would score a 1. Animals scoring 7 or 8 would have toes tending to curl inward, with a score of 9 identifying animals with toes completely curling over one another.

An ideal animal for foot angle would have a 45° set to his/her pastern. A score of 9 would include animals with extremely weak pastern set. A score of 1 identifies animals with no set to their pasterns and, as a result, are very straight through their toes and front end. With today's modern-day Angus genetics, few animals would score a 1 in the foot-angle category.

When scoring animals at a year of age, be sure to use the same age window as yearling and ultrasound collection (320-440/60 days of age). Producers should remember to score prior to trimming hooves, and score the worst front and rear foot. Scores are easiest to take when animals are on a hard, level surface and can be taken while exiting the chute or milling in a pen. Basic ration information should be submitted alongside the scores. Scores are then submitted through your AAA Login.

The directive

Continuing to collect good data across the population will allow the Association to develop a reliable tool to assist commercial users of Angus genetics in selecting the right bull for their operations. Producers are encouraged to make foot scoring part of the yearling data collection and mature cow handling processes.

In order to aid members in collecting these types of data, the Association has created a partnership with several collegiate livestock judging teams who are willing to assist breeders with scoring. Breeders can simply reach out to a participating judging coach to see if a student is available to capture on-site foot scores.

This allows the students to gain valuable contacts within the Angus industry and familiarize themselves with performance recording. It also enables breeders to collect foot scores when in many cases they do not have the manpower to get it done otherwise. While the Association encourages breeders to compensate individual scorers for their time and/or travel, this is not mandated. To find the list of participating universities at this time visit *www.angus.org/performance/footscore/footscoreentryhelp.pdf.*

If you have any further questions about foot scoring or the programs surrounding it, feel free to contact any member of the Performance Programs Department.

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Fig. 1: American Angus Association scoring system to evaluate foot angle, where a 5 is ideal

Source: American Angus Association, 2014. Illustrated by Craig Simmons.

Fig. 2: American Angus Association scoring system to evaluate claw set, where a 5 is ideal

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