



Field Notes

► by **Chuck Grove** and **Don Laughlin**, regional managers, American Angus Association

Documenting performance with AHIRSM

Angus producers have access to a wealth of information through the Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIRSM) program. Regional managers Chuck Grove and Don Laughlin answer questions as to what the program is, how producers can enroll and what they may gain from the program.

What are Angus Herd Improvement Records?

Chuck Grove: The Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR) program is the performance program of the American Angus Association designed for use by individual breeders. Performance data — such as birth weights (BW), weaning weights (WW) and scrotal circumference (SC) — are submitted to the Association using AHIR forms (electronic or paper). After data is submitted, the breeder receives data back from the Association on how individuals (sires, dams and their progeny) rank in specific traits within their contemporary groups. This information is also used in conducting National Cattle Evaluations (NCEs) to establish expected progeny differences (EPDs). For more details go to the Association Web site, at www.angus.org,

or contact the Performance Programs Department at (816) 383-5100.

Why is AHIR important?

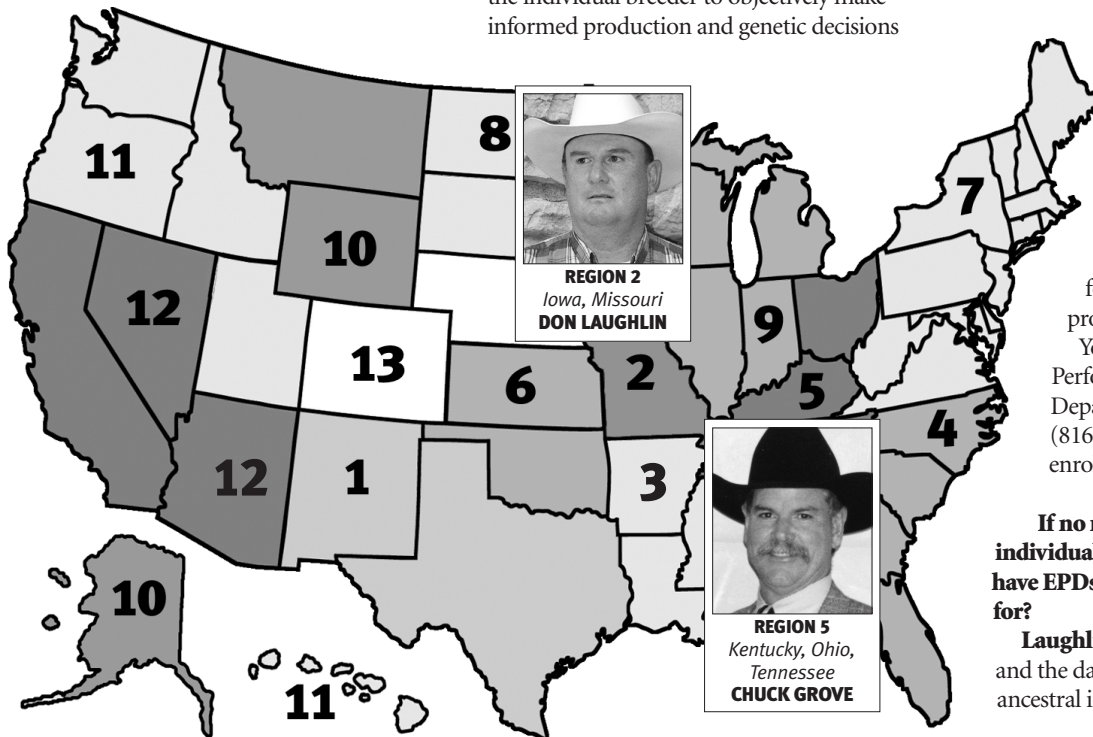
Don Laughlin: In the meat protein business, we in the cattle industry are behind the pork and poultry businesses from the standpoint of documenting the genetics in our product. In order to pinpoint production schemes, we need to accurately describe our genetics so we can design seedstock to do specific jobs in the future. AHIR records are the tool-gathering instruments we need to be able to describe the genetics Angus cattle possess.

Grove: There is a volume of literature available from university Extension departments, breed associations, bull studs and other sources on the importance of performance or production records. In simple terms, AHIR provides the tools for the individual breeder to objectively make informed production and genetic decisions

within his or her cow herd. Additionally, the entire membership benefits from the data being stored at the Association. The EPD system as we know it is the result of having a central database at the Association, where genetic evaluations are calculated.

July statistics show that year-to-date for fiscal year (FY) 2006, there were 550 more herds submitting data to AHIR compared to last year. If AHIR records are the means to establishing EPDs, why aren't all Angus herds enrolled?

Laughlin: Registration requirements do not require AHIR records as in some breeds (i.e. Simmental, Red Angus, Gelbvieh). Even though we are getting more herds than ever before on AHIR, 67% of our membership register 10 or fewer head per year. Most of those members do not attain a high percentage of their income from those cattle and, therefore, are more likely to not invest the time and money to enroll their cattle in AHIR. Let me make this very clear — there are many herds that are small in numbers that do an excellent job in submitting AHIR records, and those records are very important to making the Angus breed the largest breed in the United States.



How can a producer enroll in AHIR?

Grove: If you have a computer, the easiest way is to go to the Association Web site at www.angus.org. Click on Performance/AHIR/BRS, and then click Performance Home. Click on enroll, and follow the instructions provided.

You can also call the Performance Programs Department at the Association, at (816) 383-5100, and request an enrollment form be mailed to you.

If no records were submitted on an individual animal, how can the animal have EPDs, and what does the "I" stand for?

Laughlin: In most cases, if the sire and the dam have EPDs, there is enough ancestral information to generate

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interim EPDs for those animals. "Interim" is what the "I" stands for.

Are interim EPDs of any value?

Grove: Yes. They give a prediction of what an animal should be for a particular trait or group of traits. However, it is important to remember they are low-accuracy, which really means they are more likely to change as actual data is provided on the individual and his contemporaries and as they become parents with progeny data included in the NCE.

Why, if a producer submitted AHIR records, would their EPDs still appear to be interim values?

Laughlin: There are numerous reasons why an animal would have interim values. Some of the bigger reasons are that the National Cattle Evaluation has not been conducted since the information was submitted. An NCE is done twice a year, once in the winter and once in the summer.

Another reason can be small contemporary groups. When NCE is conducted, some cattle get split apart or edited out of the process for various reasons. Sally Northcutt, Association director of genetic research, has prepared some excellent information about interim EPDs that appeared in the "By The Numbers" column in the April 2005 *Angus Journal* that is a must read for breeders and commercial cattlemen. That information is also available on the Association's Web site.

There are a lot of ads and footnotes in sale books that talk about percentiles. What are percentiles and of what relevance are they?

Grove: Percentile tables can be found in the *Sire Evaluation Report*, also available online at www.angus.org/sireeval/index.html. There are tables for current sires, current dams, non-parent sires and non-parent dams. They rank EPDs for each trait by percentiles. An EPD in the 10th percentile would place that animal in the top 10% of its category for that particular trait.

The tables are useful in making informed selection and breeding decisions. Using the tables to identify EPDs in the upper percentiles, breeders can make major

changes in the traits they are trying to improve.

How far ahead of a bull sale does a producer need to arrange ultrasound scanning in order to have ultrasound EPDs in time for a sale?

Laughlin: Before ultrasound data can be processed, weaning weights must be processed on an animal. One of the big holdups in getting EPDs back in a timely manner has been data that is incomplete or not turned in correctly.

In the past, if correct and complete data were submitted to the lab, it would take about three days for the Association to generate EPDs for ultrasound. Add to that the time for the technician to scan the cattle and to mail or deliver those scans to the lab.

It all depends upon when you want the information available for your customers. Do you want to put it in the sale book or on a supplement sheet? It also depends on the age of the bulls when they are sold. Selling 18-month-old bulls in a March sale makes it easy to get the data turned around in time to include it in the sale book. Selling February

and March yearling bulls in a March sale creates a bigger challenge in getting the information out to potential customers.

Consider, too, that ultrasound technicians get booked up early. Schedule your scanning date early.

Any other AHIR questions you want to address?

Laughlin: One of the big problems I see occurring is the fact that people don't turn their data in to the Association in a timely fashion. They have taken birth, weaning and yearling weights, and they are ready to sell bulls privately or in a sale, but they haven't had the records processed. It causes panic on their behalf when a customer asks for EPDs.

My recommendation is to turn the records in as soon as possible after you take them; then you will not miss deadlines for the reporting of NCE, and you will have EPDs when you need them. Don't let records lay on the desk that were taken five months ago and then go into panic mode when a potential buyer asks for EPDs.

