

**Young breeders not afraid to test genetics technology.**

by *Barb Baylor Anderson, field editor*

**I**f you want to put your herd on the fast track for genetic performance, you may want to take a page from Generation Y's playbook. Many young Angus breeders are embracing new genetics technology, including the HD 50K panel, and finding value-added benefits.

Kevin Eathington, Angus producer from Avon, Ill., confirmed its value to his bottom line in March. A guest consignor at the Hobbs Angus Sale in Fairview, Ill., Eathington Angus sold Eathington Sub-Zero for \$37,000 to Genex Cooperative and 10 other breeders. Test results confirm the yearling bull has the genetics to be a high-calving-ease heifer bull.

"We did the HD 50K blood test on the bull, and he had good numbers. It was the first time we had tried the test, but I think that is the reason we had such interested buyers," says Eathington.

For the last four years, Eathington has been a guest bull consignor at the Hobbs sale. He also markets bulls, heifers and production females through the LaMoine Valley Angus Association and Illinois Futurity sales.

# Follow the Generation Y Leaders

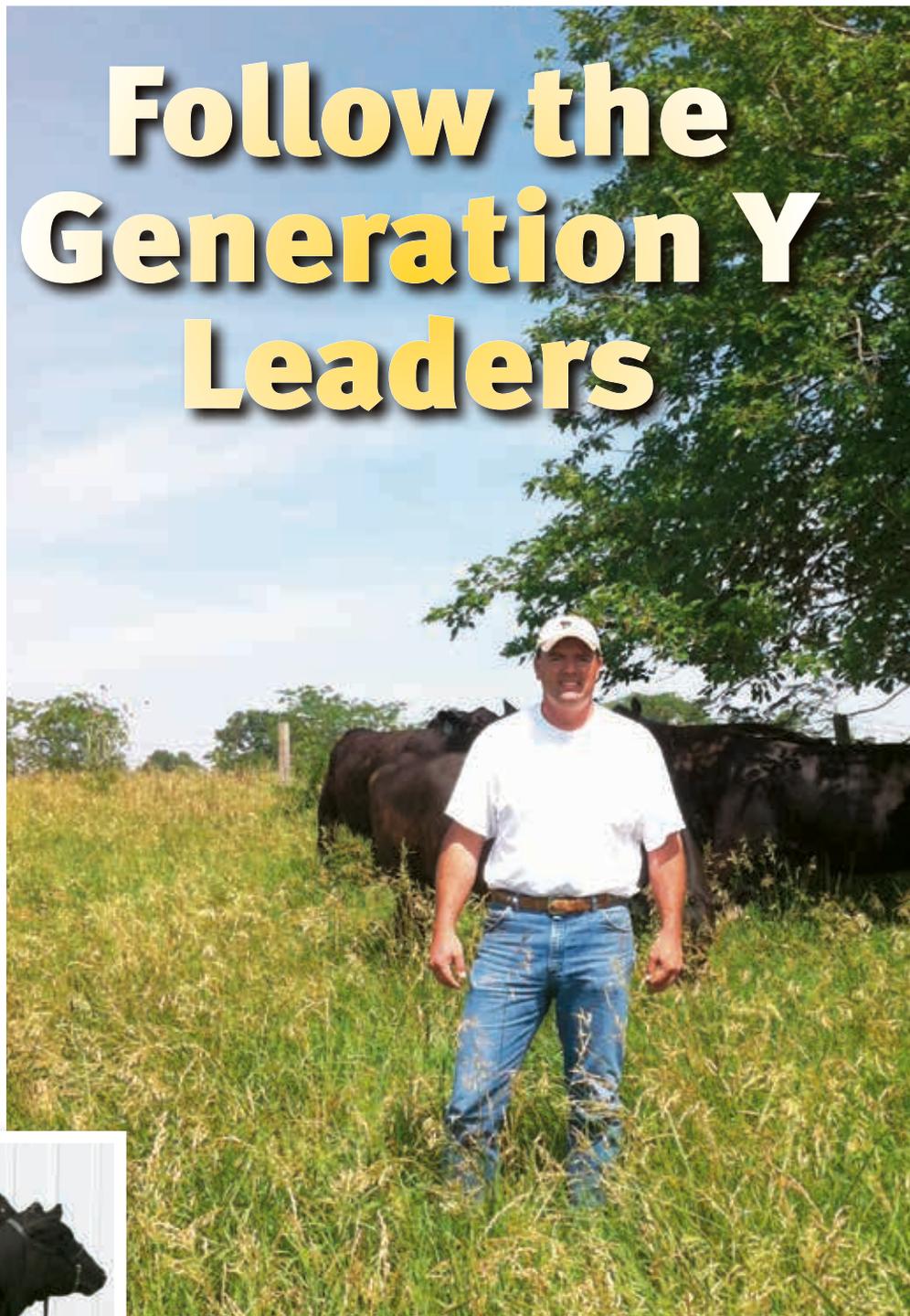


PHOTO COURTESY OF EATINGTON ANGUS

► **Above:** High-density DNA-testing is wonderful technology for small- and large-scale producers, says T.J. Curtin. "50K increases your accuracy, especially when you have so many variables with feed and handling. The faster you can identify cattle you want, the better off you will be."

► To market their seedstock, the Eathingtons have been a guest consignor at the Hobbs Angus Sale in Fairview, Ill., and market bulls, heifers and production females through the LaMoine Valley Angus Association and Illinois Futurity sales. Pictured are (from left) Patricia, Emma, Kyle, Kevin, Ella and Katelyn.

from our veterinarian in Bushnell, Ill.," he says. "I can already see it will keep moving my herd in the right direction. Producers wanting reassurance about their purchase of heifer bulls, bred females and replacement heifers get it from these test results."

Eathington Angus has 175 registered cows and a 2,000-acre crop farm.

Eathington says the test essentially provides the same level of accuracy as a bull who has sired 10 calves or more. "You get better accuracy more quickly," he explains. "The genetics plays out now instead of five years from now. That increases the odds you are making good decisions."

Eathington plans to pull blood on 31 heifers and 20 bulls this year at a cost of \$75 per test. "That may seem like a lot to some,



► **Left:** Kevin Eathington says testing his bull Eathington Sub-Zero with HD 50K gained the attention and confidence of buyers, helping this young producer sell the bull to a consortium including Genex Cooperative for \$37,000.

He first learned of the practice in 2011 when he attended the Express Ranches Sale in Oklahoma.

“They 50K’d their animals, and I really thought it was great to see how DNA and EPDs work together,” says Curtin, Curtin Land & Cattle, Blue Mound, Ill. “We did all our bulls that fall and had good sales. I don’t know specific dollar amounts the 50K added to our sales, but it did provide customers with high-accuracy results. They know we are willing to do what it takes.”

Curtin hosted a meeting at his farm with Zoetis representatives to help educate customers about the test and how to use its results.

“I am not sure it is completely understood, but customers see the promise of better accuracies on young animals, and they know it is for their benefit,” he says.

Curtin Land & Cattle has about 230 cows. They host a production sale each March, selling about 40 bulls and 40 females. Following a good 2013 sale, Curtin did a postcard survey asking participants if the HD 50K information provided value. More than 80% responded yes.

“We will test all of our yearlings this year and all of our bred heifers. We do the tests with blood cards when cattle are in the chute. It is not cost-prohibitive,” says Curtin. “50K increases your accuracy, especially when you have so many variables with feed and handling. The faster you can identify cattle you want, the better off you will be. My customers want disposition, followed by calving ease and growth. Illinois bull customers want live cattle from a tame bull.”

Curtin says for producers already keeping good records, the test should verify what you are doing and already know.

“This is wonderful technology for large or small breeders, and should be a shoe-in for those 15- to 30-cow operations,” he says. “50K is the next big thing. Depending on your herd goals, this can direct your breeding decisions and identify lines of cattle sooner.”

Eathington agrees.

“It is worth trying on a few cattle at first to see the results,” he says. “I wouldn’t jump in all the way initially, but I believe it is the trend of the future. We may not have a 1,000-head herd, but this gives us a chance to perform with them to the best of our ability.”



**Editor’s Note:** A former National Junior Angus Board Member, Barb Baylor Anderson is a freelance writer located in Edwardsville, Ill.

but it is cheaper to test and know the results before you feed them out,” he says. “I like that I can isolate bulls for customers, get my females tested and validate my breeding program. It’s a great marketing tool for customers to see you make improvements.”

### Seeing results

T.J. Curtin also has had value-added success with HD 50K testing and customers.



► The ability to speed up breeding decisions sold South Dakota producer Cody Jorgensen of Jorgensen Land & Cattle on DNA technology. Digital subscribers can click on the image above to hear Jorgensen talk about the growing importance of DNA to the cattle industry. The video, provided by Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) and the American Angus Association, is available online at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljy0Zg33GWM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljy0Zg33GWM).

PHOTO COURTESY OF CURTIN LAND & CATTLE

## HD 50K basics

Zoetis is in partnership with Angus Genetics Inc. (AGI) to distribute High-Density 50K (HD 50K) Angus tests. The partnership provides breeders access to genomic-enhanced expected progeny differences (GE-EPDs) and indexes powered by the HD 50K for Angus platform.

HD 50K for Angus is the first high-density DNA panel to identify more than 50,000 DNA markers for each tested animal and to predict genetic merit in young, unproven Angus.

GE-EPDs can be used by breeders to more predictably evaluate genetics for 14 traits — including the production traits of calving ease direct, birth weight, weaning weight, yearling weight, yearling height, mature weight, mature height, dry-matter intake, residual feed intake, scrotal circumference and docility; maternal traits of calving ease maternal and milking ability; and carcass traits of carcass weight, fat thickness, ribeye area, marbling score and tenderness.

The American Angus Association also has built a relationship with GeneSeek Laboratories in Lincoln, Neb. GeneSeek, which also offers an HD test, is featured in the Beef Leaders Institute coverage beginning on page 57.

To learn more about Angus genetics technology, visit [www.angus.org/AGI](http://www.angus.org/AGI).