



Movin' Forward

► by **Bryce Schumann**, CEO, American Angus Association

Brighter days, better heifers

Back in 2011, when the vast majority of America's cattle producers were hurting from widespread drought, the optimists among us repeatedly pointed to "better days ahead" — when the rains would fall and spring new life into struggling operations.

Times are changing

Times were tough, and they tested the fiber of every cattleman fated as an unlucky victim of those cloudless, dry days. Some left the cattle business. Most clung to the promise of better weather, a better time.

Thankfully, those days have arrived for much of the nation — at least thus far in 2014.

Beneficial rainfalls in the latter half of last year alleviated much of the badly parched countryside. It also helped produce a bountiful corn crop and, coupled with other trends, lower feed costs. At the same time, producers earned higher prices for nearly all classes of cattle.

Cattle Business Weekly reports cow-calf producers could see one of their most profitable years ever in 2014, citing anticipated national average cow-calf returns (over cash costs, including pasture rent) at approximately \$300 per head — more than a twofold increase from 2013.

Indeed, producers are giving a collective sigh of relief in the form of retained heifers. Ag economists suggest the proof lies in the fourth quarter of 2013, when beef cow slaughter sharply declined and heifer-retention interests increased.

What does all this mean for you?

It's an opportunity to build the best-quality, most-efficient cow herd in the history of the cattle business — provided seedstock producers take advantage of an important program that helps breeders identify and keep only the top-performing females.

Maternal focus

The American Angus Association introduced MaternalPlus® a couple years ago — then during the heart of drought — as an inventory-based recordkeeping system that captures additional reproductive trait data. Essentially, the voluntary system offers a more extensive recordkeeping process that tracks important information like heifer breeding records and cow disposal codes.

Through MaternalPlus, producers submit necessary data from their herds and, ultimately, further the Association's selection tools for hard-to-measure reproductive traits.

Breeders then receive important data at weaning time for calves out of inventoried cows, including calving ease, birth weight and weaning weight expected progeny differences (EPDs).

Much like traditional reporting methods,

producers simply use AAA Login to submit required records, which include heifer breeding records and, for each inventoried cow:

- calf record (weight, preweaning or disposal code);
- disposal code for cow; and
- reason designations.

Of course, breeders can enroll in this valuable program at any time or learn more at www.angus.org or through their AAA Login account.

Participation in MaternalPlus requires minimal changes from how you may currently manage your herd, but it offers optimal benefits toward more-efficient Angus females.

Lead the way

Purchasing and retaining breeding stock in the beef business requires, without doubt, a large capital investment. Programs like MaternalPlus and the Association's extensive suite of selection tools gives breeders the means to reap more reward and less risk in their investments.

The result is a more valuable herd for both you and your commercial customers.

Quality-bred, efficient females will drive the success of the beef industry, and quality Angus beef will paint the picture for consumer demand in the years ahead. The breed was largely built on the value of superior Angus females. Now is the time to make sure you're breeding the best ones possible through MaternalPlus.

If weather patterns and corn prices continue their positive trends, we could enter a period of unprecedented success — the kind this generation has never known.

If we're rebuilding a cow herd, let's build it with only the best. Let's build it with Angus.

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