

Breed Improvement

Association staff share tips for how members can make the most of programs for advancing the breed.

by *Shauna Rose Hermel, editor, & Kasey Brown, associate editor*

It was standing room only as Angus members gathered Nov. 4 for the Breed Improvement block of workshops at the Angus Means Business National Convention & Trade Show in Kansas City, Mo. Among the topics covered, Tonya Amen, director of genetic services for Angus Genetics Inc. (AGI) explained how producers can utilize the practical herd analytics available in MaternalPlus™ while laying the groundwork for future genetic selection tools. AGI President Dan Moser explained enhancements to the calculations for dollar value indexes (\$Values) made possible by today's technology. Chris Stallo, American Angus Association vice president of operations, highlighted options for digital data management.

Characterizing maternal traits

Angus breeders have done a very good job of characterizing the breed and developing expected progeny differences (EPDs) for moderately to highly heritable traits such as growth and carcass traits, said Amen. "Now it is our job to start collecting data and developing tools for those traits that are harder to develop selection tools for — the lowly heritable traits like the reproductive traits."

During the Angus Means Business National Convention & Trade Show, the director of genetic services for AGI and the American Angus Association explained a voluntary inventory-based reporting system designed to do just that. Amen explained the MaternalPlus® program, including its requirements and benefits to enrollment.

To participate in the program, producers must enroll their entire herd (including recipient females), she explained. So, the first step is often to clean up your herd inventory to make sure every active female in the Association database is actually in your herd. The fee to enroll is \$3 per cow, while heifers are enrolled for free.

"After you clean up your cow herd, you need to submit heifer breeding records every year," Amen said, noting that the Association provides a spreadsheet to simplify data submission, or you can use your current method of data submission.

"Then every year for every female in your inventory you need to submit a calf record," Amen said, explaining that might be a weaning weight or a reason why there is no weaning weight. "Did you get rid of the cow? Why did she leave the herd? Did the cow not have a calf? Did the calf die for some reason prior to weaning?"

"When you submit that calf record, we do give you a calving ease, a weaning weight and a birth weight EPD (expected progeny difference) before you even register the calves," Amen emphasized, noting one of the benefits of enrolling in MaternalPlus.

She described several helpful herd analytics available only to MaternalPlus enrollees. Under the MaternalPlus tab of AAA Login (www.angusonline.org),

program participants can access production performance reports including:

- ▶ calving distribution, showing the percentage of calves born in each 21-day period of the calving season;
- ▶ female age distribution, providing a snapshot of the age of the cows in your herd;
- ▶ calving distribution by cow age;
- ▶ calf death loss report, revealing the reason for calf loss in your herd;
- ▶ within herd genetic trend, comparing the trend for traits of choice with the overall trend of the breed;
- ▶ weaning weight by dam age;
- ▶ weaning weight by sire;
- ▶ cow body condition distribution; and
- ▶ dam disposal summary.

One of the critical elements of the program is reporting dam disposal records, Amen noted.

"This allows you to watch these things from year to year and see the reason cows are leaving your herd," she explained, noting potential disposal reasons ranging from going to the donor pen to weather to fertility problems. "The cool thing about having these disposal codes is when we go to develop tools for you related to lifetime productivity, it allows us to give credit to animals leaving the herd for things that aren't their fault and to penalize those for things like fertility that really are what we're wanting to get at with cow productivity."

To increase the visibility of those participating in MaternalPlus, Amen said, enrollees have access to a newly designed MaternalPlus logo to include in advertising and sale books. The Association's Public Relations Department is also developing sale book inserts and advertisements for enrollees to use. Options will include generic promotion for MaternalPlus or options customizable to a producer's operation.



▶ Tonya Amen, AGI director of genetic services, explained how MaternalPlus® offers Angus breeders practical herd analytics while laying the groundwork for future genetic selection tools.

PHOTOS COURTESY AMERICAN ANGUS ASSOCIATION

Another benefit to enrollees will be periodic mention in the *Angus Journal* and the *Angus Beef Bulletin*, she noted.

— by Shauna Rose Hermel

Enhancing \$F and \$B

When \$F and \$B were introduced to the beef industry 10 years ago, not as much was known about differences in efficiency as we know today, Moser told workshop participants. He explained that the \$Values for feed value (\$F) and beef value (\$B) were to be modified in the Association's December national cattle evaluation (NCE) to reflect current knowledge.

A decade ago it was known that cattle that grew faster tended to be inherently more efficient.

"There's a maintenance requirement that any living organism has every day," Moser explains. "If they can gain the same amount of weight in fewer days, there's an element of efficiency there."

However, he noted, that's only a small part of the inherent variation in efficiency that exists.

Since the \$Values were created in 2004, the Association and its members have made inroads in collecting individual feed intake data, with enough collected by 2010 to launch the residual average daily gain (RADG) EPD. That data continues to accumulate. Enough of those records are tied to genomic tests to build what Moser called a "reasonably powerful genomic



► AGI President Dan Moser explained the modifications to the \$Values for \$F and \$B that were implemented in the December NCE.

prediction for residual gain and the underlying trait of feed intake."

Moser explained that selection for feed intake alone would not be desirable, as it would result in selecting for cattle that consumed less feed, but might also gain at a much lower rate. It's the variation in intake relative to the variation in performance that relates to profitability in cattle feeding.

Moser shared breed trends for \$F, \$B, RADG and a feed intake value that to date hasn't been published, but is included in the calculation for the RADG EPD. \$F and \$B have trended upward, as has RADG — though he pointed out that trend line has flattened out some. However, feed intake requirements have begun to increase.

For the last year, Moser said, AGI has been working with Tom Brink and other economists to incorporate feed intake considerations into \$F and \$B to better characterize and predict feedlot and carcass profitability differences among sire progeny. The change to include feed intake data began Dec. 5 with the running of the Association's biannual NCE, which also included updates to the economic assumptions upon which \$Values are calculated.

"You will see changes, because changes have occurred," Moser said, noting that it would change \$Values more than ranks. However, producers can expect some re-ranking of sires, as well.

"We're trying to gauge the index so that it identifies cattle that do all the great things that Angus cattle are known to do, but also takes into account the feed intake differences that do exist in the population," he added. "In the end, we hope to provide the most current and precise estimates of profit potential using the most recent technology."

For additional information on enhancements to the \$Value indexes, see the "By the Numbers" column in the December 2014 *Angus Journal* (page 82).

— by Shauna Rose Hermel

Digital herd management

The American Angus Association has three different means by which breeders can submit herd data. Why the excess? Flexibility, answered Stallo. AAA Login, Angus Information Management Software (AIMS) and the Angus Mobile app were all designed to cater to the different submission needs of a large and diverse membership.

"They are a complement to each other. Some people don't have the high-speed Internet access that they need, and others have that high-speed Internet access," Stallo



► Association options to submit herd data electronically are popular and useful, said Chris Stallo, American Angus Association vice president of operations.

noted. Often, features within each method either come from the other, or are designed to look and perform similarly in each method to allow for easier crossover.

Why enter data online? Stallo explained that if breeders enter their data via AAA Login, AIMS or the Angus Mobile app, the data is processed faster by eliminating a middle step of Association staff typing all of the data. It also ensures accurate reporting of data by eliminating that middle step in the office. Stallo added that, on average, data entered online can be turned around within 24 hours, and breeders will see the data electronically.

Submitting data electronically is a popular endeavor. He said online transactions account for 50.06% of registrations and 30.66% of transfers, while 47.40% of weaning weights and 46.21% of yearling weights are entered electronically. Additionally, more than 15,000 members have an AAA Login account. Within the 60 days prior to his presentation, more than 8,000 distinct members logged in to perform 125,757 transactions on AAA Login. Almost 14,000 carts were checked out in that time.

In 2001, when AAA Login was launched, the website offered 13 features. Today, it offers 125, noted Stallo. "The Association gives you access to all your information through AAA Login."

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Stallo walked the group through several of the features within AAA Login (for more information on AAA Login features, check out the “Login Lowdown” column in the *Angus Journal*).

Here are a few tips he offered to make using AAA Login smoother.

- ▶ When you see a red error message, save the corrected data before moving to the cart. “We try to make those messages as meaningful as possible. Those will show up at the top. When they do, you need to correct the data and save it before it goes to the cart,” he clarified.
- ▶ AAA Login will populate the forms for you in certain cases. For example, if you are in the calf weaning entry screen and you start typing in the sire box, a drop-down list of your used sires will show up and you can just click on the desired bull.
- ▶ You can sort all of the headers within AAA Login by ascending or descending order to help find animals more quickly.
- ▶ You have the ability to store registrations electronically. If you choose yes to this option, it will default to that option unless you specify otherwise. Registrations stored electronically are easier to transfer, he added.

Stallo emphasized that AAA Login features are often built from suggestions from breeders.

“The way we make a tool better is to use feedback from people who use this on a day-to-day basis,” he noted. The Information Systems department can’t feasibly make features from all suggestions, but staff do look at what would benefit the most people. He made clear that suggestions and questions are always welcome.

— by Kasey Brown

Amen, Moser and Stallo spoke during the Breed Improvement Workshop Tuesday afternoon, Nov. 4. For more information about the Angus Means Business National Convention & Trade Show, visit the newsroom at www.angusconvention.com or watch the Nov. 17, 2014, edition of *The Angus Report* available at www.angus.org.



Convention Attendee Wins Yamaha Viking VI

Becky Billingsley, Keithville, La., is the winner of the 2015 side-by-side vehicle.

When David and Becky Billingsley traveled to Kansas City, Mo., from northwest Louisiana, they were expecting to gain a lot from the first-ever Angus Means Business National Convention & Trade Show — new friends and practical information for the ranch, and experience at the organization’s business meetings. They never guessed they would be bringing home a 2015 Yamaha Viking VI.

Thanks to a generous donation from Yamaha Motor Corp., U.S.A, the utility vehicle will make its new home at Billingsley Angus Farm in Keithville, La. With 600 pounds (lb.) of hauling and 1,500 lb. of towing capacity, the Yamaha Viking VI is made to be the toughest and most off-road-capable six-person side-by-side ever.

“The Viking VI giveaway was one of many highlights from the National Angus Convention & Trade Show,” says Becky Weishaar, Creative Media director for Angus Productions Inc. “Everyone who attended received at least one chance to win, and those who registered prior to Sept. 5 had three chances to win per registration. Our thanks to Yamaha for their support.”

The 2015 Viking VI has a suggested retail value of \$13,599. It combines Yamaha performance and durability with the comfort and convenience of a Viking — now with maximum headroom, legroom and shoulder room for six occupants. The drawing took place Nov. 6 during the American Angus Association’s Annual Meeting of Delegates.

David and Becky Billingsley have been raising Angus cattle in Louisiana for nearly 20 years. They raise Angus bulls to market to the commercial beef cattle industry, offering cattle through private treaty and regional consignment sales. This was their first time attending the National Angus Convention.

“I was impressed. I didn’t know it was going to be this big,” David Billingsley says. “Any time you go anywhere, you go to Denver, Montana or Texas and you walk in, you see all your friends, you really feel at home.”

About 2,000 Angus cattlemen, commercial producers and others attended the Nov. 4-6 event in Kansas City, resulting in a record-setting turnout for the organization’s annual business meetings and first-ever trade show. Participants from across the country enjoyed educational sessions, networking opportunities and plenty of fun.

For more news from the Angus Means Business National Convention & Trade Show, visit the Newsroom at www.angusconvention.com or watch the Nov. 17, 2014, edition of *The Angus Report* available at www.angus.org.

— by Jena McRell, digital editor



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