



EBVs RELATIVELY NEW FOR SCOTTISH BREEDERS

EBVs in the United Kingdom are part of the genetic evaluation system known as BreedPlan.

by **Barb Baylor Anderson**, field editor

Just as U.S. Angus producers study expected progeny differences (EPDs), Scottish beef producers on both sides of the auction ring are becoming more familiar and more comfortable with the use of estimated breeding values (EBVs). EBVs are similar to EPDs, but they provide an estimate of the animal's own value rather than the EPD's prediction of an animal's contribution to its progeny.

"The biggest customer for genetic evaluation is the commercial producer," says Neil Shand, breed secretary for the British Simmental Cattle Society. Shand spoke with participants of the International Federation of Ag Journalists World Congress hosted in Scotland in September 2014. "EBVs look at growth, fertility and carcass, and they help rank animals. For commercial bull selection, producers look at size, body condition score, breed, pedigree and for any physical defects."

EBVs in the United Kingdom (UK) are part of the genetic evaluation system known as BreedPlan. Ron McHattie, chief executive for the Aberdeen-Angus Cattle Society, was instrumental in bringing BreedPlan to the UK from Australia. The Society manages records for seven beef breed societies through its commercial subsidiary, Pedigree Livestock Services.

"We were first on the BreedPlan program, and now 60% to 65% of the UK is on the system," says McHattie, who has been with the Society since 1995. He also oversees the Society's branded beef program, the leading quality beef brand in supermarkets there, and is coordinating an initiative to collect DNA samples from every pedigreed calf.

Weight EBVs include milk; birth; and 200-, 400-, 600-day and mature cow weights. Fertility/calving EBVs include scrotal size, days to calving, gestation length and calving ease. Carcass traits are ribeye area, fat depth, retail beef yield, intramuscular fat and carcass weight. They are testing shear force (meat tenderness), net feed intake and structural soundness EBVs.

Why the surge in Angus interest?

UK Angus registrations are up, and the Society's McHattie is working to push breed expansion.

"We have seen a surge in Angus popularity," he says. "Commercial cattlemen are using more Angus bulls, and 270,000 Angus-sired calves per year are being registered through passports (identifications), even though commercial cow numbers are declining."

McHattie says several factors work in favor of the breed's growth:

- ▶ The Angus brand pricing premium is about 14¢-18¢ per pound



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dead weight vs. other compatible weights and breeds. The Scotch market particularly likes Angus-sired beef, and the premium has been as high as 36¢ per pound.

- ▶ Producers want low-maintenance cattle that are welfare friendly, even-tempered and offer calving ease. Farmers are getting older and want cattle that are easier to manage.
- ▶ The average Angus carcass is about 835 pounds dead weight, which is an ideal, moderate size. Big cattle don't cut and fit well in boxes.
- ▶ Angus is the No. 1 brand in the red-meat sector.

"Consumers know that Angus is the number one brand, and we build on that. Demand always exceeds supply," says McHattie. "If you ask consumers to name a brand, they know Angus."



Editor's Note: A former National Junior Angus Board member, Barb Baylor Anderson is a freelancer from Edwardsville, Ill.