

Customers Speak Up

Angus Productions Inc. polled readers of the *Angus Beef Bulletin* about their bull-buying and management practices.

by Shauna Rose Hermel

In the October 2004 *Angus Beef Bulletin*, we asked readers to answer some questions about their operations, management and bull-buying practices. While not a scientific survey, the answers of the 356 respondents provide some interesting discussion points.

Basic herd demographics

Of the 353 respondents who answered the question, 93.8% said they were commercial cattlemen, and 16.1% said they were seedstock producers. Another 1.1% indicated they were veterinarians, 0.8% said they were Extension personnel and 3.4% marked "other." (The numbers add up to more than 100% because they were not meant to be mutually exclusive. Many respondents indicated, for instance, that they had both commercial and purebred cows.)

When asked how many commercial cows

they would calve in 2005, 32% indicated they would calve 49 cows or fewer, 22% said they would calve 50-99 cows, and 46% indicated they would calve more than 100 commercial cows.

When asked how many registered cows these "commercial cattlemen" would calve in 2005, most (63%) said none; however, 32% said they would calve 1-49 registered cows, 3% said they would calve 50-99 registered cows and 2% said they would calve more than 100 registered cows. The survey did not ask whether the respondents intended to register the calves.

Survey respondents indicated they purchase, on average, two bulls per year.

Most of the survey respondents had British-based cow herds, with 39.9% indicating their cow herds were straightbred Angus and 37.5% indicating their herds were Angus-British-cross. Nearly 30% described

their herds as Angus-Continental-cross. Only 2.6% and 0.9% answered that their herds were non-Angus British-cross or Continental-cross, respectively. Again, answers were not mutually exclusive.

We asked *Angus Beef Bulletin* readers to indicate what breeds influence the genetic makeup of their cow herds. With 356 readers responding, the results showed:

Angus	97.5%
Hereford	32.6%
Simmental	19.4%
Charolais	13.5%
Limousin	12.6%
Brangus	9.8%
Gelbvieh	8.1%
Red Angus	7.0%
Shorthorn	5.3%

Other breeds that were indicated at less than 5% include Brahman, Beefmaster, Maine-Anjou, Braford, Tarentaise, Salers, Holstein, Longhorn, Santa Cruz, South Devon, Senepol, Chianina, Barzona and Braunvieh.

When asked where they obtain their replacement heifers, 85.4% said they retain some of the heifers out of their own herds as replacements, 20.8% buy from purebred breeders, 14.9% buy from commercial producers, and 7.6% buy from the sale barn. With 353 answering the question, 41% of the survey respondents indicated they sell replacement heifers to others.

Bull-buying habits

From this survey, it appears *Angus Beef Bulletin* readers are extremely loyal to the Angus breed when it comes to bull-buying habits. Nearly 70% described their bull-purchasing practices as buying Angus only. A two-breed or three-breed rotation was indicated by 17.4% and 5.1% of the respondents, respectively. Only 3.4% said they purchased different breeds at random. Of the 8.4% indicating "other," answers indicate use of another straight breed, use of artificial insemination (AI) and/or home-raised bulls.

Readers were also asked to indicate what breeds of bulls they had purchased within the last five years. The results were:

Angus	97.7%
Simmental	11.1%
Hereford	10.8%

Fig. 1: Average ranking as a trait valued in seedstock supplier (1=most valuable)

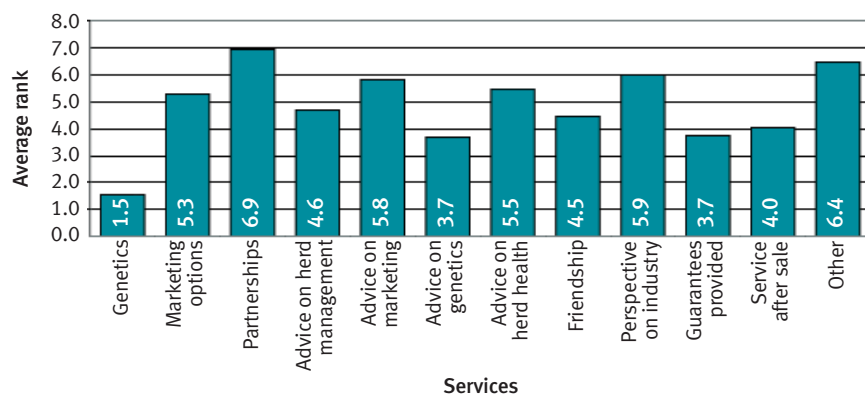
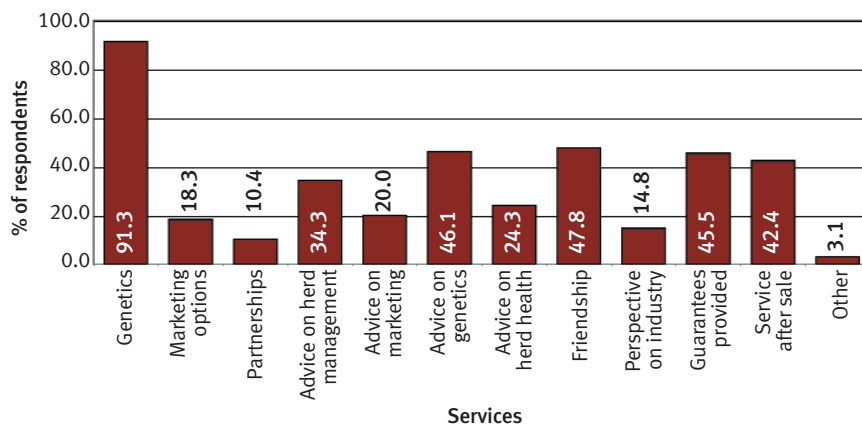


Fig. 2: Percent of respondents valuing trait in seedstock supplier (% marking; not rank)



Gelbvieh	7.7%
Limousin	6.3%
Charolais	5.4%
Red Angus	4.3%
Brangus	4.0%

Other breeds mentioned included Beefmaster, Shorthorn, Brahman, Maine-Anjou, Chianina, Santa Cruz, South Devon, Braunvieh, Tarentaise and Balancer; 2.6% indicated they purchased crossbred bulls.

Marketing weaned calves

Angus Beef Bulletin readers were asked to check all that applied regarding how they market their weaned calves. Sixty-nine percent indicated use of a local auction market, 34.6% sell calves by private treaty, 15.2% retain ownership, and 7.6% sell by satellite auction. Only 3.7% indicated they sell through their seedstock source.

AngusSourceSM is being received favorably by commercial cattlemen. Among the survey respondents 6.1% indicated they have used AngusSource tags, and another 46.7% said they haven't used the program yet but planned to. Of 312 respondents answering the question, 71% said the program was valuable or extremely valuable.

When asked which management practices they used in 2004, the results indicated:

- 93.0% castrated male calves;
- 82.0% individually identified calves;
- 77.7% provided an initial respiratory vaccine;
- 67.6% provided a booster vaccination;
- 55.5% bunk-broke calves postweaning; and
- 53.8% backgrounded 45 days.

In addition, 43.7% indicated they creep-fed calves before weaning, 27.6% collected birth weights, and 40.3% collected weaning weights (though respondents were not asked to distinguish between individual weaning weights vs. a group weaning weight). Thirty-two percent indicated they dehorned their calves, though several respondents who had marked it as a management practice, and several who did not, said they dehorned genetically with an Angus bull.

Angus Beef Bulletin subscribers would appear to be more advanced in their management than the national average. In the 1997 Beef Cow-Calf Survey conducted by the National Animal Health Monitoring Service (NAHMS), only 48.1% of ranchers individually identified calves, and 74.5% castrated their bull calves before selling them.

Only 35.7% of producers in the NAHMS survey vaccinated calves for respiratory disease prior to sale, and 40.1% indicated they backgrounded their calves for more

than 30 days. While this NAHMS study is still used by industry experts as a benchmark of production practices, it is important to recognize that the study was conducted several years ago, and some of the disparity may be due to industry-wide improvement in herd management practices.

Value in seedstock supplier

We asked readers to indicate what they valued most in a seedstock supplier by ranking several characteristics in a provided

list. While some respondents did provide a rank, some checked characteristics they deemed important. We have summarized the answers in two ways to provide a comparison (see Figs. 1 and 2). Fig. 1 shows the average rank, with 1 being most valuable among 12 provided characteristics. Genetics (1.5), advice on genetics (3.7), guarantees provided (3.7), service after the sale (4.0), friendship (4.5) and advice on cow management (4.6) were indicated as the

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Table 1: Summary of responses to the question, "What product or service would you like your seedstock supplier to provide?"

Individual:	
▶ Honesty/truth (3)*	▶ Health verification by ear notch
▶ Integrity	▶ Individual animal health, treatment and testing data — printed, not just verbal — since birth
▶ Sincere interest	▶ Advice on herd health
Information:	
▶ Expected progeny difference (EPD) information (6)	Purchasing options:
▶ More information/all EPDs (6)	▶ More private treaty sales
▶ Carcass information/actual carcass data (3)	▶ Honest auctions
▶ Complete information/records (2)	▶ Pictures and sale books on the Internet
▶ Frame score/translate hip height to frame score (2)	▶ Delivery
▶ DNA-enhanced EPDs	▶ Matching the right bull with individual herds
▶ Cow-calf records	▶ Keeping bulls until breeding season free of charge
▶ Linear measurement	▶ Bull leases
▶ Pounds (lb.) per inch (in.) of height	Service after the sale:
▶ Pedigrees	▶ More marketing options/ways to sell calves for a premium/partnerships or alliances (18)
Cattle:	
▶ Quality bulls/genetics (10)	▶ Guarantees (6)
▶ Gentle disposition (3)	▶ Assistance getting carcass data on calves from bulls purchased (4)
▶ 2-year-old bulls (2)	▶ Alliances/programs specifically for small-scale producers (3)
▶ Sound bulls (2)	▶ Follow-up on the cattle after sale (3)
▶ Reliable seedstock that will work for individual programs (2)	▶ Friendly service/service after sale (3)
▶ Calving-ease bulls	▶ Advice on genetics (3)
▶ Better maternal traits	▶ Advice on marketing (2)
▶ Fleshing ability	▶ Prompt transfer of registration papers
▶ Fertile bulls	▶ Advice on cow herd management
▶ Grass-fed bulls	▶ Perspective on industry
▶ Grass-finished beef	▶ Buy back calves of bulls
▶ Honest, adapted cattle for Southeast and fescue	▶ Value-based marketing through quality genetics
▶ Replacement heifer packages	▶ Newsletter
▶ Avoidance of show genetics	▶ Hat
▶ Stock that will produce with minimum input	Miscellaneous
▶ Birth dates	▶ Keep up the good work (5)
▶ High weaning and yearling weights	▶ Promote to the public the benefits of cattle
▶ Cheaper bulls with the same quality	▶ To be able to look at the seedstock supplier's cow herd and bulls used
▶ Fertility protein testing	▶ Embryo transfer (ET)
▶ A bull bred for marbling, weaning weight, yearling weight and hardiness to pass on to calves	▶ Cow-calf handling facilities
Health:	▶ Alliance to buy vaccines, minerals, feed supplements in bulk or at reduced prices
▶ Health/vaccination records (8)	▶ Corn
▶ Pulmonary arterial pressure (PAP)-testing (2)	▶ Provide all-roughage-diet bull test
	▶ More information on Virginia cattle

*Numbers in parentheses indicate number of respondents stating this request.

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most highly valued characteristics in a seedstock supplier.

We also looked at the same question in terms of how many respondents marked the particular trait as being important. Genetics again topped the list, with 91.3% indicating it as something they value from their seedstock suppliers. Friendship (47.8%) was closely followed by advice on genetics (46.1%), guarantees (45.5%) and service after the sale (42.4%). It may be interesting to note that

only 10.4% indicated they value partnerships with seedstock suppliers and only 14.8% indicated they value their seedstock supplier's perspective on the industry.

We asked *Angus Beef Bulletin* readers to indicate, without prompt, what product or service they would like their seedstock suppliers to provide (see Table 1, page 125). Answers again show a strong desire for quality genetics, guarantees and service after the sale.

Assistance in getting carcass information

back on calves and marketing options to garner more premiums from their Angus genetics were among the most often-cited requests. Alliances were cited several times.

Expected progeny differences (EPDs) and more complete information on the bulls available to purchase were other popular requests.

Many producers indicated they wanted additional health information, some requesting individual vaccination and health test information, and some wanting complete herd health records. One producer wanted to see ear notches to show the cattle had been tested for persistent infection (PI) with bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD).

Some respondents mentioned specific characteristics they desired in the bulls they purchased. Traits ranged from fleshing ability to calving ease to yearling weights, though disposition and soundness were most frequently requested. A desire for getting a handle on carcass traits can be gleaned from the number of producers interested in getting carcass information back on their calves.

Requests for the Association

When asked to indicate, again without prompt, what products or services they would like the American Angus Association to provide, answers varied from the general, "More information," to the specific, "Help purebred breeders isolate bloodlines with known disposition problems."

Comments like, "They have about everything available I would want," and "Continue to provide valuable information through media such as the *Beef Bulletin*," would indicate that the Association is providing the services bull customers need and that commercial producers do value the *Angus Beef Bulletin* as a source of information (see Table 2). One reader even requested the *Angus Beef Bulletin* be made a monthly publication.

The readers' responses also clearly indicate they value the Association as an information source and look to it for advice in the future. One reader requested the Association provide "Information that will guide me in the next 30 years."

The *Angus Beef Bulletin* will continue its dialogue with commercial producers and will continue to share those results with *Angus Journal* subscribers. If you have a question you would like to pose to commercial cattlemen, send your question(s) to Shauna Rose Hermel, Editor, 3201 Frederick Ave., Saint Joseph, MO 64506, or e-mail to shermel@angusjournal.com.

Table 2: Responses to the question, "What product or service would you like the American Angus Association to provide?"

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|--|---|
| ▶ You do a super job right now (9)* | ▶ Help for small-scale cattle producers (2) |
| ▶ Kudos to the <i>Angus Beef Bulletin</i> (4) | ▶ AngusSource SM sales (2) |
| ▶ More information (46), with specific requests for: information about expected progeny differences (EPDs) and how to read and use them (6); health program advice and information (5); herd management (4); industry news (4); genetics (2); marketing (2); animal identification (ID) (2); junior programs (2); feed options and relation to end results; for small herds; country-of-origin labeling (sometimes referred to as COL or COOL); legislation regarding livestock in general; finances; organic beef production; pasture management; fall-calving cows; optimal crossbreeding programs; calving tips; increasing information for commercial producer; how-to information for young/new producers; seedstock and commercial information; rudimentary education; technical information; value marketing; alternative feed formulation for calves, cows, and finishing steers and heifers; information from feeders on specific weaning and vaccination protocols; sale information that would benefit small commercial cattle operations | ▶ Free tags |
| ▶ Specific EPDs or performance information (12): accurate EPDs; frame EPD; fleshability EPD; \$Values; linear measurements; detailed cow herd management and efficiency ratios; more usable numbers-ranking system, especially maternal traits, udder, etc.; more carcass information on calves followed all the way to harvest; printed genetic data on bulls and dams; continue EPD update on purchased bulls; bull carcass information; birth weight data | ▶ A market for Angus calves for a premium |
| ▶ Marketing options/strategies (9) | ▶ How to use EPDs to help hold your cow size steady so they don't get too large |
| ▶ Articles (8), specifically articles about Angus producers, producers in Plains states, large producers, stories on different ranches throughout the United States and on producers in the West | ▶ Web-based/printed regional listing of heifers/cows for sale or wanted, with qualifying criteria of a particular quality or known background |
| ▶ <i>Angus Journal</i> subscriptions for nonmembers (3) | ▶ More concrete information on Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) and how small-scale producers can produce for that market |
| | ▶ Work with other breed associations to provide the best beef for our consumers, maybe carcass test together on Angus-cross cattle |
| | ▶ Work with other breed associations in marketing F ₁ Angus bulls |
| | ▶ Harvest data from packer on radio frequency ID (RFID) tags |
| | ▶ Option to feed for smaller-volume producers |
| | ▶ Help purebred breeders isolate bloodlines with known disposition problems |
| | ▶ Making a dollar |
| | ▶ Not so much paperwork |
| | ▶ Promotion of the Angus breed |
| | ▶ Toll-free help number |
| | ▶ Bull test that has an all-roughage diet (no grain, no fat bulls) |
| | ▶ Provide a source of information on pulmonary arterial pressure (PAP)-tested bulls |
| | ▶ Availability |
| | ▶ Local perspective and markets |
| | ▶ Tutorials for showing heifers |
| | ▶ Free computer software for cattle producers |
| | ▶ Valid birth dates of heifers, especially show heifers |
| | ▶ Investigation of local auctions |
| | ▶ Access to sire summary booklet |
| | ▶ More sale dates |
| | ▶ Free pocketbooks |
| | ▶ Hat, shirt and/or coat |

*Numbers in parentheses indicate number of respondents stating this request.