

Ultrasound in Action

Krebs Ranch of Gordon, Neb., relies on ultrasound data as a part of its marketing program.

Every registered animal at Krebs Ranch near Gordon, Neb., is ultrasound-scanned at one year of age. That's a vital part of a winning formula, according to Jake Scott, who handles marketing and customer relations for Krebs.

Krebs Ranch focuses on raising purebred Angus and a small selection of Sim-Angus bulls, selling around 400 bulls each year to customers in the Nebraska Sandhills and surrounding states. Krebs also operates a bull stud, selling semen from top sires.

"It's a whale of an outfit, and we're lucky to have the account," says ultrasound technician Alvin Ruiz. He and his son, Brett, operate WY Cattle Service from Yoder, Wyo. In addition to ultrasound duties, they provide freeze-branding and artificial insemination (AI). "Krebs Ranch is sort of a one-stop shop where you can get all the commercial cattle you want, as well as seedstock and semen from some of the top proven sires in the country."

Ultrasound on the rise

The U.S. cattle inventory, as well as the number of beef cow operations, has been on the decline for the last 20 years (USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service). Drought and increased input costs have forced many beef producers to reduce their herds or sell out completely.

However, it is not all "doom and gloom" in the beef cattle industry. Some areas are slowly recovering from the drought and have seen increased production in grass and hay. Additionally, the USDA estimates that this year's corn crop has the potential to be a record crop.

Here at the CUP Lab™, we have seen an increase in the number of head processed. This spring we surpassed 2 million total animals processed through the lab. The Ultrasound Guidelines Council (UGC) reports that the number of animals scanned is up across the board. We can loosely interpret this to mean that even though there are fewer cattle overall in the United States, more of those animals are being scanned. This can be attributed to a number of factors, including, but not limited to, increased awareness of the benefits of ultrasound, larger emphasis on the role of ultrasound data in expected progeny differences (EPDs) by the breed associations, and the tireless efforts of field technicians across the United States.

— National CUP Lab & Technology Center

Krebs Ranch is owned by Eldon and Louisa Krebs, who started the operation in 1979. Partnered for a while with George Lemm as Whitestone-Krebs, the ranch is now solely in the Krebs family hands, says Scott.

"They ultrasound large numbers of cattle, and they're able to identify the outliers and the superior animals," adds Ruiz.

"Using ultrasound and EPDs (expected progeny differences) enables them to identify those top sires more quickly."

Ultrasound data is entered into breed databases, and Scott says they use the EPD and other data heavily in their operation.

"The database is a great place for producers to make comparisons on desired traits for their herd by using the wealth of data to isolate those genetic components of interest," says Bill Bowman, president of Angus Genetics Inc. (AGI).

"We like to keep it in a range," says Scott, explaining the Krebs breeding philosophy. "We add strong muscle and performance genetics to the already strong marbling genetics found naturally in Angus cattle to get a blend of performance and muscling our customers like."

Out of 283 bulls sold at their last sale, 190 had a ribeye area (REA) of 15 square inches (sq. in.) or more, and 100 measured in at 16 or more. The sale average was 15.7 sq. in.

"That's with a nice medium level of marbling," adds Scott. This year's average was 4.25%, but he says they are satisfied with 3% to 4%. "We're not chasing that, as long as it's in range."

The data generated by ultrasound is important to Krebs' customers as they plan their own breeding strategies. Scott says they have offered data for more than 10 years, and the majority of their buyers rely heavily on it.

Says Bowman, "Basing decisions on ample information is what produces the best outcomes."

Krebs Ranch has not yet ventured into DNA testing for breeding purposes, but Scott says it is under consideration.

"We're looking into it," he says, describing their status as in the fact-finding stage. "It's been utilized so much more heavily in dairy



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and pork, there's plenty of feedback on what they liked and didn't like. It's something to implement carefully."

Scott has listened to the American Angus Association characterize its use and its genetically enhanced EPDs and sees the potential. "It's an interesting tool based on emerging technology," he says, adding he believes it was wise for the Association to combine genomic and phenotypic data into one measure.

"Genomic data, like ultrasound data, is analyzed as an indicator trait for economically relevant carcass traits," says Bowman. "The AAA has made it a priority to utilize genetic selection tools to serve the breed and the industry."

Bowman emphasizes the need to continue to include ultrasound-generated phenotypic data in selection tools.

"We still need to consider the phenotypic evaluation," he says. "Ultrasound is a valuable information source that enhances the accuracy of the breed's EPDs. It continues to play an integral role in generating reliable predictions."

That information has helped Krebs Ranch produce stock with high gain and strong performance, just what the future ordered, according to Scott.

"It's a great time to be in the beef industry. Demand is good. Exports are good. Our culture is used to high-quality food and people like great-tasting beef. The next decade holds great potential," says Scott. "When we get some rain, you better fasten your seatbelt and enjoy the ride."



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