



Up Front

► by **John Crouch**, executive vice president

NBQA shows strengths, weaknesses

A National Beef Quality Audit (NBQA) is conducted every five years. Funded in part by beef checkoff dollars made available from the Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) program, the purpose of the NBQA is to evaluate beef and beef products from a consumer standpoint and give direction to producers, feeders and packers relative to product improvement.

The good news

The first NBQA was conducted in 2000. Preliminary results from the 2005 audit released July 11 at the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) midyear meeting in Reno, Nev., indicated that marked improvement has been observed in three areas of concern.

First, the microbiological safety factor in beef and beef products has greatly improved. We applaud feeders, packers and processors for their attention to detail in making this happen.

Secondly, an improvement in genetics relative to beef quality has been observed, primarily because of an increase in Angus

genetics in the commercial cow herd and increased emphasis on genetic evaluation for quality.

A third area of improvement cited was the decrease in injection-site blemishes. This information was gleaned from interviews with personnel in the industry ranging from purveyors, feeders and packers to actual consumers.

The bad news

These same people were not so kind regarding other issues. Their No. 1 area of concern was a lack of uniformity and consistency in beef quality due to a lack of marbling, tenderness and overall palatability. Further specified was an inconsistency within quality grade. Carcasses are too large, and retail cuts are too big. The end product is excessively fat. Lesions still exist in trimming. We still have dark cutters and blood splashes. And there is a lack of uniformity in weight and shape.

From an export standpoint, two criticisms were leveled at our industry — first, the lack of a universal system to verify

Table 1: Phenotypic trends in the Angus carcass database

Year	Carcass weight, lb.	Ribeye area, sq. in.	Marbling score, degree	Fat thickness, in.
1975	573	10.9	Slight ³⁰	0.41
1985	711	12.0	Small ³³	0.50
1995	749	12.6	Small ⁸²	0.52
2005	780	12.7	Modest ⁰⁵	0.53

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AMERICAN ANGUS ASSOCIATION

3201 Frederick Ave., Saint Joseph, MO 64506-2997
Office hours: (M-F) 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (Central)
phone: (816) 383-5100; fax: (816) 233-9703
e-mail: angus@angus.org ■ home page: www.angus.org

OFFICERS

Ben Eggers, president, 3939 S. Clark, Mexico, MO 65265; eggers@socket.net ■ **John Crouch**, executive vice president, 3201 Frederick Ave., Saint Joseph, MO 64506; jcrouch@angus.org ■ **Jot Hartley**, vice president, 1005 W. Canadian, Vinita, OK 74301; jot_hartley@hotmail.com ■ **Paul Hill**, treasurer, 11503 SR 554, Bidwell, OH 45614; champion@zoomnet.net

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Terms expiring in 2008—**Gregg Blythe**, 3207 Old River Rd., Decatur, AL 35603; clydec7@aol.com ■ **Bill Davis**, 34840 CR 106, Sidney, MT 59270; rolnrok@direcway.com ■ **Robert (Bob) Schlutz**, 260 Colonel's Dr., Box 66, Columbus Junction, IA 52738; rwschlutz@aol.com ■ **John Schurr**, 40842

Farnam Rd., Farnam, NE 69029; john@schurrtop.com ■ **Gordon Stucky**, 421 NE 70 Ave., Kingman, KS 67068; circlesangus@pixius.net

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President—Sharee Sankey, Council Grove, Kan. For a complete list of officers, refer to page 46.

REGIONAL MANAGERS—Refer to page 337.

CERTIFIED ANGUS BEEF LLC

President—Jim Riemann, Wooster, Ohio. For a CAB staff listing, refer to page 75.

age and source; and second, a lack of marbling.

The complete 2006 NBQA, compiled from information gathered by researchers from Colorado State University, Oklahoma State University, Texas A&M University and West Texas A&M University, will be released later this fall.

Angus viewpoint

So, from an Angus standpoint, what does this mean, and how should Angus breeders react?

First, we can be proud and thankful for many things. As early as 1972 the American Angus Association adopted a program to measure and characterize the Angus breed for traits that affect the quality and consistency of Angus beef. Angus breeders have at their fingertips tools for use in selecting seedstock for optimum performance in reproduction, growth, maternal value and end product composition.

Further, the *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) brand enjoys a full complement of staff who work with every aspect of the beef

industry in creating demand for CAB products. This, in turn, is in keeping with the mission of Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB), which is to create demand for Angus seedstock.

Secondly, as a point of interest, let us examine phenotypic trends in the Angus carcass database (see Table 1, page 30).

Since 1975 we have increased carcass weights by more than 200 pounds (lb.), increased ribeye area by almost 2 square inches (sq. in.), and increased marbling by almost two marbling scores — from Slight³⁰ to Modest⁰⁵.

By the same token, since 1985, fat thickness has remained virtually the same with no improvement observed. It is, therefore, obvious that little genetic selection pressure has been placed on reducing external fat.

Relative to reproduction and maternal ability of female counterparts to steers, perhaps this is not all bad. While it is certainly within our capability to reduce excessive fat genetically, the extremely negative correlation between the price of corn and excessive fat in the end product

makes it difficult to do so from a practical viewpoint. The management of external fat can be accomplished by harvesting cattle at a point wherein there is an optimum balance between quality and yield.

Thirdly, if we are to reduce carcass size, we must select for decreased growth rate simply because of the high genetic correlation between growth and carcass weight. On the other hand, industry spokesmen have suggested that carcass weights will not decrease until there is an economic incentive to do so.

Things are not always black or white, or perhaps I should say blue or yellow. There's lots of gray and green in between. In the meantime we are blessed to have a breed and an end product marketing program wherein quality and consistency are more stable.



E-MAIL: jcrouch@angus.org