Optimal Milk Module

An online tool helps producers determine what EPDs will work for their operations.

by ***Mathew Elliott***

With the increasing costs of production, the American Angus Association is encouraging producers to view and use the Optimal Milk Module online tool. Developed in 2005, this interactive tool allows producers to use personalized information to evaluate and estimate what Angus Milk expected progeny differences (EPDs) will fit their operation.

The Optimal Milk Module can be found at *www.angus.org/tools/optmilk*. Once a producer is on the site, it requires three simple steps to complete. The first step is for producers to determine the average weight and milking ability of all cows in the herd that are 2 years old and older.

Producers must then determine the total pasture and feed cost for the year. This includes all the costs — pasture and forage, silage and feedstuffs, supplements, as well as harvest and equipment costs. To provide a benchmark, a link to typical feed costs by state is available for producers to reference.

After providing the feed costs and clicking the "Next" button, the final step is to choose the variability of feed resources in the area. If at any step a producer has a question, each of the sections has a "Help" link that will provide more detailed information.

The results page will show the producer's answers to the previous questions in the herd assumptions box, and the results box shows the calculated information. The first figure is the estimated cost of feed energy for your farm or ranch, and the second is the Angus Optimal Milk EPD range for your operation.

After viewing the results, producers can click a link that offers some steps to incorporating the right milk genetics in their herd.

"I think it's vitally important to keep reintroducing this to producers," says Ty Groshans, Association director of commercial programs. "With the increasing price of pasture, harvested forages and other feed costs, the Optimal Milk Module may be more valuable now than ever in helping producers find the optimal animal for their operation."

The Optimal Milk Module is designed for producers who wean their calves at 6 to 8 months of age, so module results may be less appropriate for those who practice early weaning.

While on the Optimal Milk Module page, producers can also click a link to more information on selecting the right milk level for their herd. That page contains links to other articles, as well as article excerpts and quotes about the importance of an optimal milk ratio.

"This year at the February Board meetings, we sat down and discussed how we could help producers deal with the increased production prices they are incurring," Groshans says. "The Optimal Milk Module was mentioned as something that is beneficial. Increased milk production affects calf sale weights, but it also requires a large amount of feed energy from the cow. We are trying to help producers find that optimal range that will benefit them the most."