

# Readers Sound Off in Survey

*Angus Beef Bulletin* readers share management practices, opinions in survey.

by Micky Wilson

In the February 2006 *Angus Beef Bulletin*, we asked readers to answer some questions about their cattle operations, management and practices. While not a scientific survey, the answers from the 76 respondents provide interesting insights into the commercial cattle industry.

Please note that some of the answers add up to more than 100%. Questions were not meant to be mutually exclusive, and many respondents marked multiple answers for questions.

**Table 1: Breed influence in commercial cow herds**

| Breed      | % herds |
|------------|---------|
| Angus      | 96.1%   |
| Hereford   | 31.6%   |
| Simmental  | 25.0%   |
| Gelbvieh   | 15.8%   |
| Brangus    | 13.2%   |
| Charolais  | 11.8%   |
| Red Angus  | 11.8%   |
| Other      | 10.5%   |
| Brahman    | 6.6%    |
| Limousin   | 3.9%    |
| Beefmaster | 1.3%    |
| Shorthorn  | 1.3%    |
| Braford    | 1.3%    |

**Table 2: Percent of respondents purchasing bulls of respective breeds in the last five years**

| Breed      | % herds |
|------------|---------|
| Angus      | 96.1%   |
| Simmental  | 13.2%   |
| Hereford   | 10.5%   |
| Other      | 10.5%   |
| Gelbvieh   | 9.2%    |
| Brangus    | 9.2%    |
| Red Angus  | 6.6%    |
| Crossbreed | 5.3%    |
| Charolais  | 2.6%    |
| Limousin   | 2.6%    |

## Demographics

We started by asking *Angus Beef Bulletin* readers to describe their cattle operation, and 86.8% of respondents said they were commercial cattlemen, 21.1% said they were seedstock producers, 2.6% said they were veterinarians, and 3.9% marked "other."

When asked how many commercial cows they would calve in 2006, 6.6% said they wouldn't calve any commercial cows, 11.8% said they would calve less than 35, 6.6% said they would calve 35-49, 25% said they would calve 50-99, 28.9% said they would calve 100-249, 14.5% said they would calve 250-499, and 6.6% said they would calve 500-999 (see Fig. 1, page 98).

When asked how many registered Angus cows they would calve in 2006, 63.2% said they wouldn't calve any registered Angus, 25% said they would calve less than 35, 2.6% said they would calve 35-49, 2.6% said they would calve 50-99, and 6.6% said they would calve 100-249.

Of the 75 respondents who answered the question, "Which best describes the genetic base of your herd?" 42.7% reported straightbred Angus, 33.3% reported Angus-Continental-cross, 20% reported Angus-British-cross, 2.7% reported Continental-cross, 1.3% reported British-cross (not Angus), and 8% marked "other."

When asked which breeds influenced their cow herd, nearly all reported Angus

influence, while nearly one-third reported Hereford influence and one-fourth reported Simmental influence (see Table 1).

We asked *Angus Beef Bulletin* readers where they got their replacement heifers. Nearly all (96.1%) said they raise their own replacements, while 13.2% said they buy from a purebred breeder, 11.8% said they buy from a commercial breeder, 5.3% said they buy replacements at the sale barn, and 2.6% marked "other." Of the 73 respondents who answered the question "Do you sell replacement heifers?" 58.1% said yes; 41.9% said no.

When asked, "Do you use the EPD (expected progeny difference) profiles of the bulls you use to select replacement heifers?" 74% said yes, 17% said no, and 9% said it does not apply.

Spring is still the predominant calving season for *Angus Beef Bulletin* readers (see Fig. 2, page 98). Nearly 65% said they calve in the spring only, 20.3% said they calve in both the spring and the fall, 5.4% said they calve in the fall only, 1.4% said they calve in the summer only, and 1.4% said they calve year-round.

## Bull buying

We then asked *Angus Beef Bulletin* readers to describe their bull-buying practices, and 63.2% said they buy only Angus bulls, 25% said they utilize a two-breed rotation, 6.6%

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**Table 3: What commercial producers value most in a seedstock supplier**

| Item                      | % respondents mentioned by | Avg. rank in value (1 = most valuable) |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|--|
| Genetics                  | 95.9%                      | 1.4                                    |
| Guarantees                | 74.3%                      | 3.0                                    |
| Service after sale        | 70.3%                      | 3.3                                    |
| Advice on genetics        | 68.9%                      | 4.0                                    |
| Friendship                | 68.9%                      | 4.4                                    |
| Advice on herd management | 51.4%                      | 4.7                                    |
| Marketing options         | 47.3%                      | 5.0                                    |
| Advice on herd health     | 47.3%                      | 5.7                                    |
| Perspective on industry   | 47.3%                      | 5.8                                    |
| Advice on marketing       | 44.6%                      | 5.6                                    |
| Partnerships              | 37.8%                      | 5.6                                    |
| Other                     | 8.1%                       | 2.9                                    |

said they utilize a three-breed rotation, 2.6% said they buy bulls at random, and 7.9% marked "other."

On average, survey respondents purchased two bulls per year. When asked what breeds of bulls they had purchased in the last five years, 96.1% marked Angus (see Table 2, page 97). Simmental bulls and Hereford bulls had both been purchased by more than 10% of our survey respondents. Gelbvieh, Brangus, Red Angus and crossbred bulls were each mentioned by more than 5% of respondents.

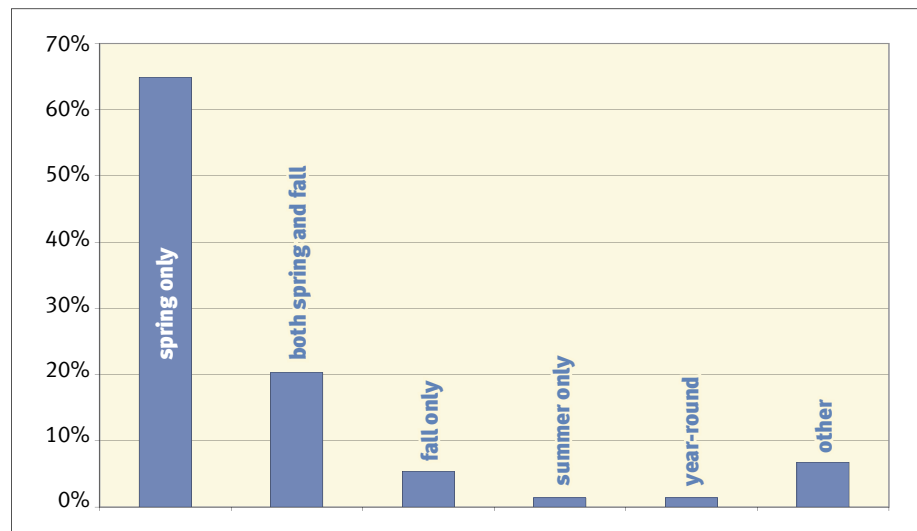
The survey asked respondents to rank items as to what they valued in a seedstock supplier. We analyzed the answers two ways:

- ▶ by the average rank; and
- ▶ by the number of respondents indicating it as among the traits they value.

By either measure, the genetics provided was the most valued asset (see Table 3, page 97), with guarantees, service after the sale, advice on genetics and friendship following.

More than two-thirds of respondents (68.4%) indicated they request a transferred registration paper on every Angus bull purchased. When asked if they received an updated list of the current EPDs of their Angus bulls from the American Angus Association, 52.6% said yes, 26.3% said no, 13.2% were unsure, and 7.9% said it did not apply. Of the 52.6% of respondents who did

**Fig. 2: Calving season**

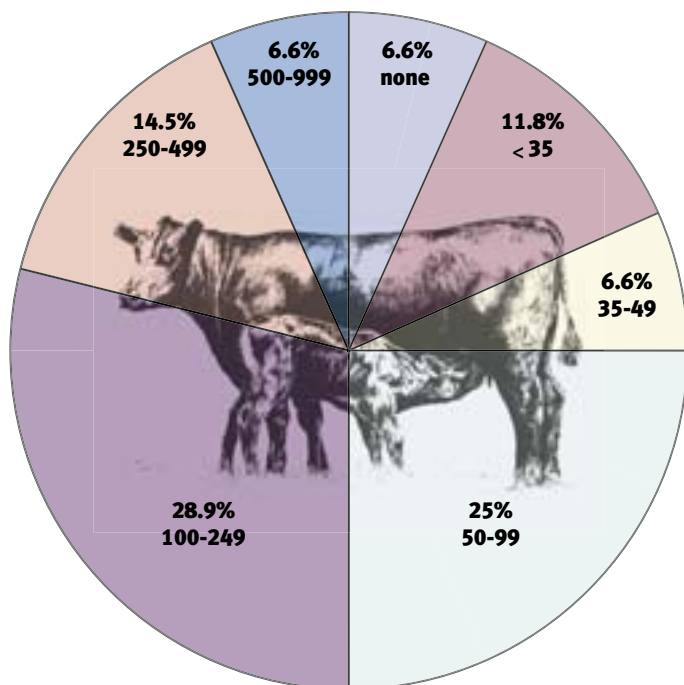


receive EPD updates, 40% found it extremely valuable, 42.5% found it valuable, 15% found it somewhat valuable, and 2.5% said it was of no value (see Fig. 3).

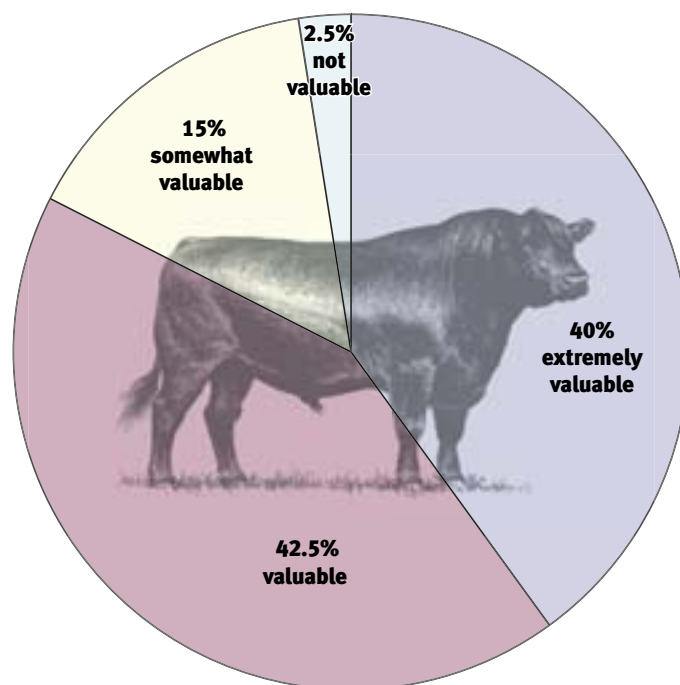
When asked what criteria they use when selecting bulls for natural service, survey respondents rated performance measures on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being very important, 5 being of no consideration). Results would indicate all of these performance measures are valued by commercial cattlemen (see Table 4).

Not surprising, birth weight EPD was given the highest rating at 1.3. Weaning performance also received a high rating, followed closely by scrotal circumference, carcass marbling, yearling weight and ribeye area predictors. Milk, other carcass and ultrasound measures, and the dollar value indexes (\$Values) rated scores of 2.2 to 2.6, while yearling height and mature weight and height were the least valued, though still a respectable 3.2.

**Fig. 1: Number of commercial cows producers expected to calve in 2006**



**Fig. 3: Value EPD updates provided on bulls for which commercial customer receives a properly transferred registration certificate**



## Marketing maneuvers

Of the 75 respondents who answered the question, “How do you market your weaned calves?” 57.3% indicated they sell their calves through a local sale barn, 50.7% said they sold calves private treaty, 17.3% said they retain ownership, 5.3% said through a satellite auction, and 5.3% said through a seedstock source, while 4% marked “other.”

Of the 72 respondents who answered the question, only 2.8% indicated they currently use AngusSource® tags, but 51.4% indicated they plan to use the genetic-, source- and age-verification program provided by the American Angus Association. Still, 45.8% said they don’t use AngusSource and don’t plan to.

When asked to rate AngusSource, more than half (52.6%) rated the program as extremely valuable or valuable. Another 35.6% responded that it was somewhat valuable; and 11.9% responded that it is of no value.

**Table 4: Importance placed on various criteria used to select bulls for natural service (rated on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very important and 5 being not considered)**

| Item                           | Avg. rating<br>(1 = most valuable) |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Birth weight EPD               | 1.3                                |
| Weaning weight EPD             | 1.8                                |
| Scrotal circumference          | 2.0                                |
| Carcass marbling EPD           | 2.0                                |
| Yearling weight EPD            | 2.1                                |
| Carcass ribeye area EPD        | 2.1                                |
| Ultrasound ribeye area EPD     | 2.1                                |
| Milk EPD                       | 2.2                                |
| Carcass weight EPD             | 2.2                                |
| Ultrasound % intramuscular fat | 2.3                                |
| Beef value (\$B)               | 2.3                                |
| Weaning value (\$W)            | 2.4                                |
| Carcass fat EPD                | 2.5                                |
| Ultrasound fat EPD             | 2.6                                |
| Feedlot value (\$F)            | 2.6                                |
| Grid value (\$G)               | 2.6                                |
| Mature weight EPD              | 2.9                                |
| Yearling height EPD            | 3.1                                |
| Mature height EPD              | 3.2                                |

When asked if they use the EPD profile of their bulls to help market their calves to potential replacement heifer buyers, 37.7% of respondents said yes; 35.1% said no, and 27.3% said it does not apply.

## Herd health

When asked which management practices they used on their 2005 calf crop, a very high percentage castrated (93.4%) and individually identified (90.8%)

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**Table 5: Summary of responses to the open-ended question, “What product or service would you like your seedstock supplier to provide?”**

### Marketing

- ▶ Marketing alliance
- ▶ Marketing assistance
- ▶ Buy back calves
- ▶ Assist in marketing calves from their bull bloodlines

### EPDs

- ▶ Accurate birth weight EPDs
- ▶ Want to be able to look at EPDs before I purchase a bull
- ▶ EPDs, frame score
- ▶ Explain EPDs, how to compare breeds
- ▶ EPDs, growth rate, temperament

### Herd health

- ▶ Certify Johne’s free
- ▶ Health programs [Johne’s testing, persistently infected (PI) bovine viral diarrhea (BVD) testing, neospora testing], carcass ultrasound
- ▶ Better vaccination program

### Services

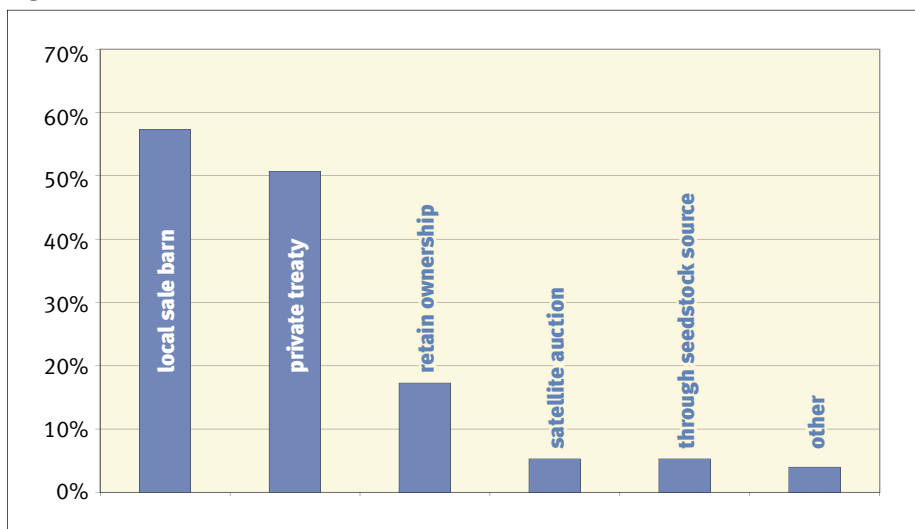
- ▶ To follow up with any information that may be helpful
- ▶ Transportation/delivery, Internet pictures/catalog, live on Internet
- ▶ Honesty
- ▶ Delivery
- ▶ Transfer pedigree after purchase without begging

- ▶ Trip to my farm to evaluate my herd and suggest bulls to complement my cows
- ▶ Photo of dam, disposition of herd, health status of herd (negative BVD, negative Johne’s, complete vaccination program), actual numbers on the animal
- ▶ Call back to see how we are getting along with the animals we purchase
- ▶ Lease options
- ▶ AI service on coming second-calf heifers

### Miscellaneous

- ▶ Information on how they are getting more fertility in their herd
- ▶ More April and May bull sales, better recordkeeping of birth weights and EPDs by suppliers who sell private treaty
- ▶ More info on temperament
- ▶ Identification (ID) tags and electronic carcass data
- ▶ Cost of gain
- ▶ Bulls that are not overconditioned
- ▶ More information on the rations and feedstuffs used to develop bulls and maintain their cows so I’m able to compare with our feed program
- ▶ Calving ease, temperament, birthweight, weaning weight
- ▶ More forage-fed bulls, bulls are too fat
- ▶ Actual performance
- ▶ Ultrasound

**Fig. 4: Method used to market weaned calves**



calves (see Fig. 5). Nearly 87% gave an initial respiratory vaccination, and 83% followed up with booster vaccinations.

Nearly 65% bunk-broke their calves after weaning, and 60.5% said they held their calves for 45 days after weaning. More producers (48.7%) collected weaning weights than birth weights (35.5%), and nearly one-third of the producers said they creep-fed their calves.

When asked, "Do you vaccinate your beef herd?" 53% said yes, 26% said no, 13% said they were unsure, and 8% said it did not apply.

**Information needs**

To help gauge whether we are on target with the current editorial mix in the *Angus Beef Bulletin* and to help set the story plan for the future, we asked readers what information they would like to see in the publication. Responses included cow herd management, 86.7%; calf management, 78.7%; herd health, 74.7%; using EPDs, 70.7%; marketing weaned calves, 70.7%; bull management, 70.7%; stories about producers, 68%; industry information, 58.7%; Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) news and information, 53.3%; retained

ownership, 52%; collecting carcass information, 52%; Association news, 50.7%; sale dates, 50.7%; information on beef alliances, 48%; and National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) news and information, 37.3%.

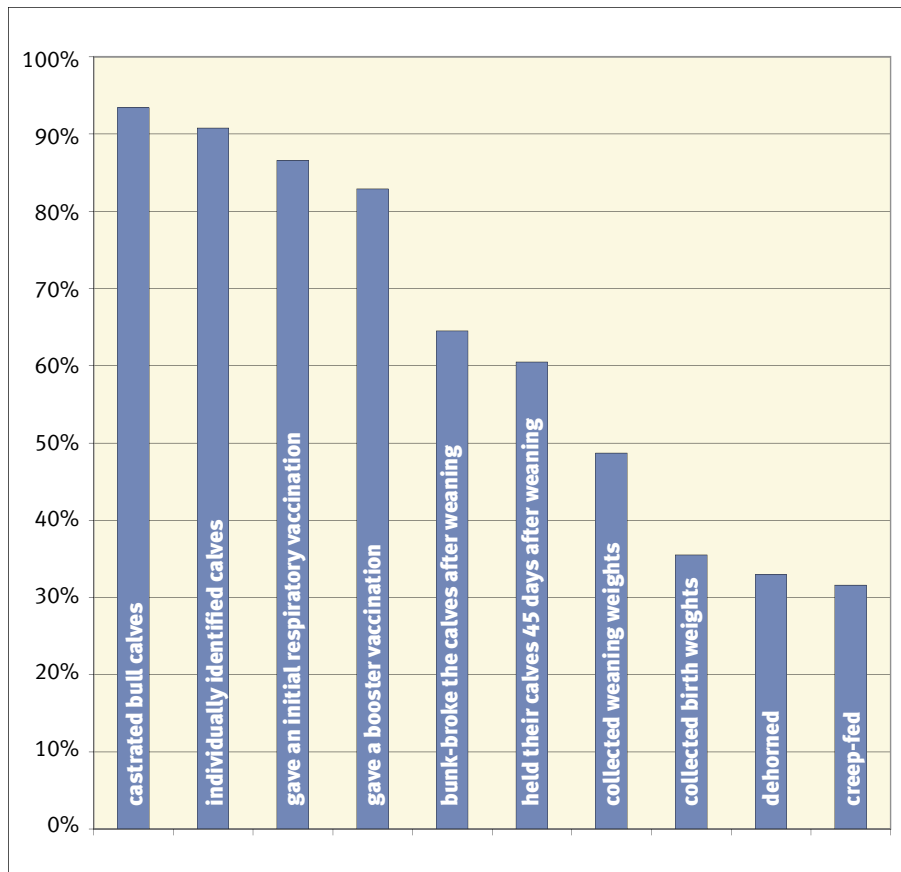
**Congrats!**

All surveys that were returned to Angus Productions Inc. by April 1 were entered in a drawing. Three names were chosen to receive their choice of a polo or long-sleeved denim shirt with the "Angus: The Business Breed" logo. Congratulations to E. Selden Collins, Pickford, Mich.; Dave Mills, Malad, Idaho; and Dustin Ladenburger, Stratton, Neb., as their names were drawn to receive a prize.

The *Angus Beef Bulletin* will continue its dialogue with commercial producers and will continue to share those results with *Angus Journal* readers. If you have questions you would like to pose to commercial cattlemen, send them to Shauna Rose Hermel, editor, 3201 Frederick Ave., Saint Joseph, MO 64506, or e-mail them to [shermel@angusjournal.com](mailto:shermel@angusjournal.com).



**Fig. 5: Management practices used on the 2005 calf crop**



**Table 6: Summary of responses to the question, "What product or service would you like the American Angus Association to provide?"**

**Marketing**

- ▶ More info for the smaller producer, niche marketing
- ▶ Get AngusSource® tags back where we can tag at birth
- ▶ To be able to sell cattle with National Animal Identification System (NAIS) for the commercial cowman
- ▶ Marketing assistance, research info
- ▶ More help at sale barn level
- ▶ CAB and All Natural need to buy small cow-calf operators' calves direct, would assure end user of product

**EPDs**

- ▶ A database to calculate EPDs for commercial offspring
- ▶ How to read and use EPDs
- ▶ A way to analyze the info from my crossbred calves to update the EPD profiles on my bulls
- ▶ A stayability EPD
- ▶ Angus Sire Summary with comprehensive EPDs
- ▶ Help find proven low-birth weight bulls

**Genetics**

- ▶ Bloodline potential
- ▶ To follow F<sub>1</sub> cattle in AngusSource to allow us to crossbreed our commercial Angus cows
- ▶ New bloodlines in advance of trend

**Miscellaneous**

- ▶ Names and addresses of local people who AI
- ▶ Forage-based bull tests
- ▶ Listing of breeds that participate in health programs posted on Web site
- ▶ Mail Sire Summary to *Angus Beef Bulletin* subscribers
- ▶ Cost of gain, feed efficiency
- ▶ Strong lobbying efforts in the political arena resisting excessive environmental regulation, high taxation, other similar things
- ▶ Mature frame score on all bulls
- ▶ Mature cow weight
- ▶ Focus on yield grade and cattle with muscle
- ▶ Interesting and invigorating ways that may help me make a profit raising cattle

**Kudos**

- ▶ CED on Angus bulls to help make my selection for AI sires to use on my heifers is excellent idea
- ▶ They are doing great, very valuable information all the time
- ▶ I think you do a great job for us commercial people
- ▶ Continue good service, including AHIR
- ▶ Continue education classes/workshops (i.e. "Understanding EPDs: How to Apply Them," or "Long-term Plan for Sire Selection")