

Conference Speakers Encourage End-Product Focus

by **SHELIA STANNARD**

Nearly 400 Angus enthusiasts from 30 states, Canada and Australia gathered Sept. 25-27 in Lexington, Ky., for the 2000 National Angus Conference and Tour. The conference, themed "Angus — Setting the Pace for the Beef Industry," followed a day-and-a-half tour of Angus herds in the Bluegrass State. The three-day event was made possible, in part, through a partnership with Pfizer Animal Health.

Keynote speaker Gary Smith, distinguished professor of animal science at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, emphasized that producers must be consumer-focused rather than customer-focused.

"Can you satisfy the people who are going to sit down and eat your product?" Smith asked those in attendance.

Consumers have six key concerns — safety, healthfulness, affordability, preparation ease, convenience and taste — that the beef industry must keep in mind, Smith said. He identified Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) as having a branded beef program that has experienced continued success, even in times of decreased beef demand. He said that brand identity would lead to brand loyalty and eventually to brand equity in the beef business.

"Just imagine a beef industry in which

the targets are agreed upon in the beginning and based upon what customers want and what consumers will purchase and eat and enjoy," Smith said. "Just imagine a part of the foundation of a new beef industry that has progressively greater reliance on Angus genetics by the cow-calf producers of North America."

Essential tack

John Crouch, director of performance programs for the American Angus Association, agreed that producers are in the food business, not the cattle business. He discussed the use of expected progeny differences (EPDs) to improve the end product.

Crouch compared livestock improvement to planning a trip. First, the industry must know where it is. Second, the industry needs to know where it wants to go. And third, they must plan a route. The *Sire Evaluation Report* is one tool many have used and will continue to use to improve their product.

"Due to the low genetic relationship between marbling and other carcass traits, we can increase marbling, ribeye area and per-

cent retail product and decrease external fat with the same sires," Crouch said. "Our job is to identify the sires."

Mike Kasten, a commercial cattle producer from Millersville, Mo., said he selected Angus cattle for his 450-head operation due to several factors. He wanted to produce higher-quality cattle that would make a profit. He also was looking for cows that could produce on grass and wanted a wide selection of higher-quality genetics with which to work. During the past three years, 20% of his calf crop has met *Certified Angus Beef*[™] (CAB[®]) carcass specifications.

"In this breed we can have it all," Kasten said. "Our data would show that, with the right bull selection, you can have both high-grading and high-gaining traits in your cattle."

The future of the industry, Kasten said, is dependent on the seedstock producers' and the commercial producers' working together to produce genetics to fit the demands of consumers. He suggests producers forge marketing alliances, work closely



"Commercial programs with high-percentage Angus breeding and predominately straightbred herds offer advantages that can favorably compensate for the lack of heterosis that would be gained through crossbreeding," said **Sally Dolezal** of Dolezal Enterprises, Derby, Kan.



Nearly 400 Angus enthusiasts attended the 2000 National Angus Conference Sept. 27 in Lexington, Ky.

with one another to obtain profitable genetics and facilitate recreational producers' participation in breeding decisions that result in a desirable end product.

Current opportunities

Consumers are still passionate about beef, said Ray Ramsey, director of the MLE Marketing Division of Southern States Co-operative Inc., Richmond, Va.

"When is the last time you heard someone say, 'that was a great piece of chicken I ate last night?'" he asked. He added that now is the time to take advantage of the better economic climate to regain lost market share for beef.

It is key that all segments of the industry understand each other. For continued success in the future of the beef industry, Ramsey encouraged increased use of source verification and alternative feeder-calf marketing options, such as genetically similar sales, Internet marketing and producer-feeder contractual agreements.

Mark Gardiner, president of Gardiner Angus Ranch Inc., Ashland, Kan., said cattle

producers have more opportunities in the beef business today than they ever have. The producers must take advantage of resources like the Association's performance database and *Sire Evaluation Report*.

"Data-based selection is not a fad — it is here to stay," Gardiner said. "We will see more improvement in the Angus breed for carcass traits in the next five years than we have seen in the previous 30."

"If we wake up and use the data, we can do anything and everything," Gardiner told the audience. "There are no good or bad EPDs. Breeders must select the traits that will work for their individual herds. Beef producers will want to work together to produce a high-quality, safe product for the consumer."

To obtain a copy of the 2000 National Angus Conference proceedings, call (816) 383-5100. Photographs and information about the conference and tour are also available online at www.angusjournal.com/nationalconference.



"It's not what I learned about today, but it's what I do about it when I get home," said Association Executive Vice President **Richard Spader** in his closing remarks.



See the story below for coverage of the 2000 National Angus Tour.

INSIGHT:

2000 National Angus Tour

Angus enthusiasts from the United States, Canada and Australia traveled to the Bluegrass State for the 2000 National Angus Tour Sept. 25-26. Headquartered in Lexington, the tour visited some of the area's most progressive seedstock and commercial operations.

A convoy of eight buses, named after Pfizer Animal Health products, took participants on a day-and-a-half tour through some of the nation's richest horse and cattle country. Stops included the Central Kentucky Angus Association Sales Pavilion, Danville; Anderson Circle Farm, Harrodsburg; Brookview Farm, Winchester; the University of Kentucky Animal Research Center, Versailles; and Bittersweet Station, Lexington. The tour also included stops at the Kentucky Horse Park, Lexington, and the Labrot and Graham Distillery, Versailles.

From start to finish, the 2000 Na-



Eight buses of Angus enthusiasts enjoyed the Kentucky countryside during the day-and-a-half 2000 National Angus Tour.

tional Angus Conference and Tour was a program developed to give Angus producers the tools to succeed.

For more highlights of the event, visit www.angusjournal.com/nationalconference.

- Angie Stump Denton



Angus cattle took center stage during the National Angus Tour. More than 24 Kentucky Angus breeders displayed their genetics at various stops. [PHOTO BY ANGIE STUMP DENTON]



The new University of Kentucky Research Center at Versailles was the location of the Tuesday lunch. After lunch Dean Oran Little welcomed the Angus enthusiasts and invited them to take a self-guided tour of the facility followed by a bus tour of the farm. [PHOTO BY SHELIA STANNARD]



Tour hosts and guests showcased their top genetics. At each farm stop, tour participants could evaluate some of the top Angus genetics in Kentucky. [PHOTO BY SHELIA STANNARD]



More than 400 Angus breeders from nearly 30 states and two foreign countries attended the event. [PHOTO BY SHELIA STANNARD]