



The Angus Link

by **BILL BOWMAN**, *director of commercial relations, American Angus Association*

Your 'little black book' to success

Our industry continues to demand more knowledge and information on the cattle that are produced. We no longer talk about value-based marketing as futuristic. As cattle are marketed, value is assigned to superior producers, and discounts are assigned to animals that fall outside what remain very wide windows of acceptability.

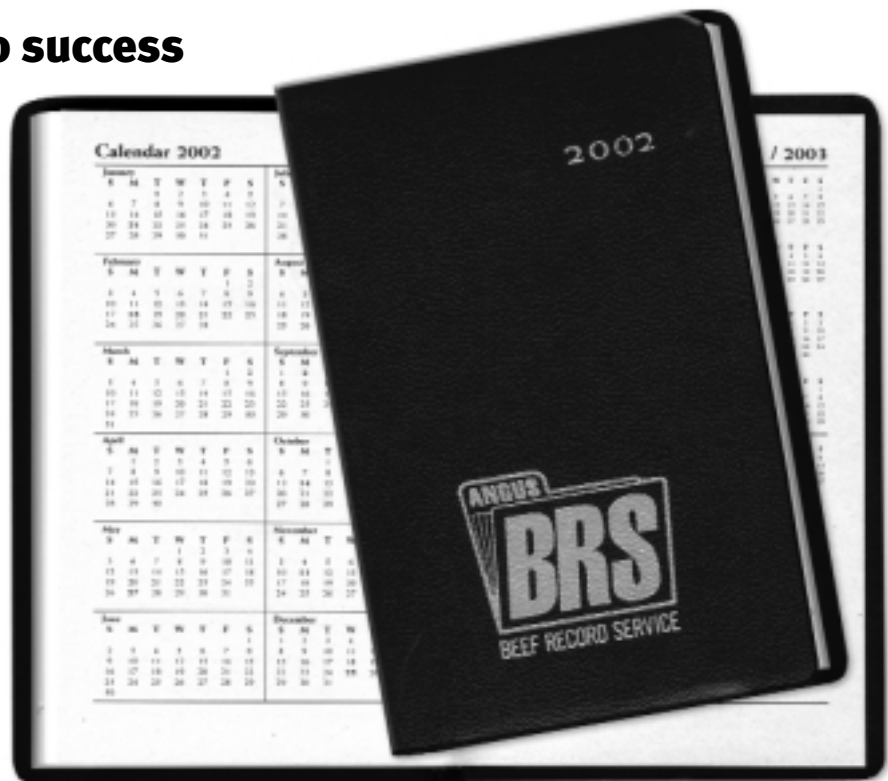
A need to go beyond simply measuring gross pounds of a commodity product has led to innovations in how we manage, measure and market cattle. With a value-based system, we are accumulating more data on the final phase of the beef production cycle. That information is, no doubt, very much needed to make decisions of economic importance to the producer from whom the genetics originated.

However, we still have to keep in mind that there are three key production areas that influence profitability to an even greater extent than end-product value. Most economic models would still point to the need for producers to measure and evaluate reproduction, growth and the maternal complex to maintain profit opportunities at the cow-calf level.

The predicament is that many folks go to great lengths to obtain the carcass data on their calf crop, but they fail to tie that data to individual performance in the feedlot or to the cow or bull responsible for producing that calf. An open cow doesn't produce many dollars worth of production for an operation. Furthermore, to quote John Crouch, American Angus Association director of performance programs, "The growth rate and carcass quality on a calf dead at birth are alarmingly poor!"

Use Angus BRS to improve herd

The American Angus Association established the Angus Beef Record Service (BRS) about a year ago to provide a mechanism for commercial producers to use data from their herds to assist in making decisions that would improve their well-being. Angus BRS is a tool that can help producers immediately improve management and genetic decisions. But the real value of a program like the Angus



BRS comes as one considers the future application of the accumulated data and use of these tools to construct a more fact-oriented, decision-making process.

Angus BRS gives producers with mountains of information a way to have that data managed, analyzed and presented in a format that can help them increase the value of the cattle in their herds by identifying where selection can improve their programs. By evaluating information in the reproductive phase, the production phase and the end-product phase, we can truly characterize the breed, biological type and genetics of the cattle that excel in a particular environment or management situation.

The 'little black book' approach

As we consider how we get this information, a couple of needs become very apparent. First, we must capture this data on an individual basis to make the most progress. We talk about the need for a universal identification (ID) system and having the ability to track this data through the various segments of the industry, but the first big pitfall that must

be overcome is identity within the herd. The challenge is simply to provide a unique ID for each of the cows within your herd. Only then can you establish an effective recordkeeping system.

We have developed a pocket calendar and recordkeeping book to assist commercial cow-calf producers in their efforts to maintain accurate field records on their cows. Complete breeding records, calving records and available weights with their corresponding dates are all pertinent data that can provide a complete picture of a producer's operation. Having bits of data missing is just like working a jigsaw puzzle without all the pieces — the entire picture is never quite finished.

One piece at a time, we must use the individual records to identify the outliers, and thus improve our production systems. After accumulating the information on your herd in the Angus BRS Black Book, it can be transferred and submitted to the Angus BRS program on simple forms that can be mailed to our office.

The most exciting new tool for Angus

BRS users is Internet access. Angus BRS Online allows you to submit data and view your records at any time, day or night. Contact our office if you would like an Angus BRS Black Book or to receive further information on Angus BRS Online.

ID systems for today and tomorrow

We see a tremendous amount of press and information on ID programs, including many concepts being considered for a National Animal Identification Program. ID methods, including the use of electronic ID (EID) devices, biometrics and tracking systems, will help to further expand the increased production of process- and source-verified beef products, most of which will be marketed in one of the increasing number of branded beef programs.

Preparing for the future, the Angus BRS program uses a unique AIN (American Identification Number) as a reference to each animal within our database. That number is not physically attached to the animal at this point, but Angus BRS provides a solid plan to incorporate the verified individual ID of an animal within a herd, also linking to a visual or electronic ID that may be in use.

Source verification and process verification will grow to become essential

elements for producers seeking the greatest opportunity for marketing. Be certain any record system you adopt has these capabilities for the future.

Electronic handling of data will become a more widely used method of efficiently managing information in commercial industry. By eliminating a point of data entry with the electronic transfer of the data, accuracy increases. The expanded use of EID and the further automation of data collection at the ranch, feedlot and packing levels will build tremendous “mounds” of data that will become invaluable for continued improvement in our industry.

Prepare your operation for the future

Change invokes a certain level of excitement, and we are experiencing some very exciting times, especially as we evolve into an industry willing to evaluate the contribution of each segment and willing to initiate change to improve the end product — a meal option for a consumer somewhere in the world.

We, as an industry, are entering a new realm. Technology breakthroughs will better allow us to measure potential consumer satisfaction and the ultimate value differences related to the end product. The challenge to tie this

information back to the ranch and ultimately to the genetics responsible for that consumer experience — good or bad — is not a simple or inexpensive one.

As we are able to quantify and identify variations in the commercial industry within systems like Angus BRS, we will build a database that will in turn allow us to make predictions for the future performance of our cattle. Just as today expected progeny differences (EPDs) are provided as a genetic prediction tool for seedstock, in the future we will build models that will offer predictions on commercial cattle for the economically important traits.

The members of the American Angus Association have recognized the importance of remaining focused on both the consumer and the commercial cattle producer. That commercial cow-calf producer is actually the consumer of registered Angus seedstock. And, the continuous development of tools and programs to enhance the profitability of those producers will help to keep Angus genetics at the forefront of our industry in the future as well. Make use of the tools and opportunities like Angus BRS that can shape your program for the future.

