



Your Link to



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The black-hide ride

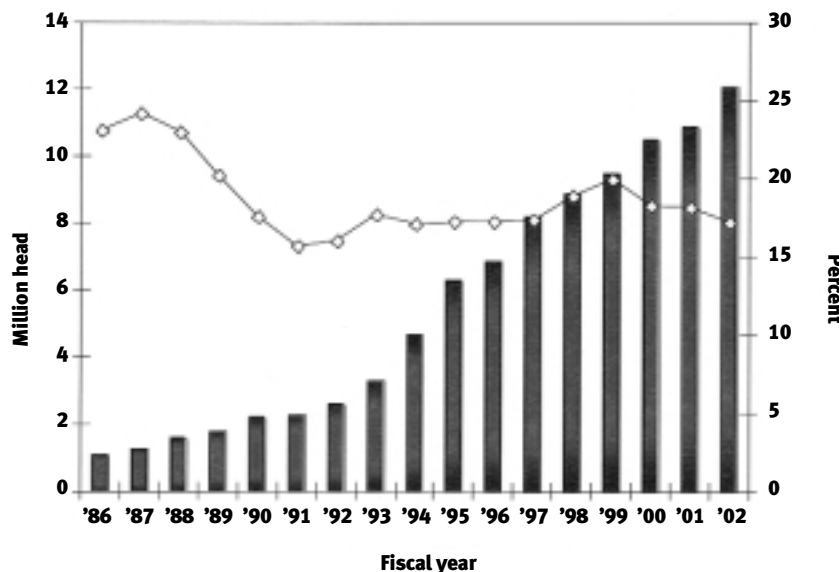
A black hide represents higher than average carcass quality to many buyers. Above average is not a very strong claim to fame, however, and Angus cattle offer a lot more than that.

Why are you producing Angus cattle? There is no wrong answer, but the least correct answer might be “to produce black-hided calves.” An increasing number of buyers these days are taking their cues from Shania Twain and saying, “That don’t impress me much.”

OK, so they have a black hide. But do they perform above average in the feedlot and in the packinghouse? Will the females rebreed? Those are the real questions, and you should be able to supply the answers.

Perhaps two of the leading answers to the question of why you produce Angus cattle would be maternal function and carcass value. Sometimes proponents of one answer badger those who favor the other, like the beer commercial, “Tastes great!” vs. “Less filling!” But just like the solution to that advertising quandary, most producers have learned that Angus can be the maternal breed with great carcass value.

Fig. 1: The trend in the number of black-hided cattle (bar graph, million head) plotted against the trend in CAB® acceptance rates (line graph, %)



Buyers more selective

Feedlot buyers won’t stop at asking if your calves are truly Angus or Angus-cross; they will want to know more specific information, such as bloodlines, expected progeny

differences (EPDs) for growth and carcass traits, and anything about the herd’s historical data. They want to know their chances for a pleasurable feeding experience.

Unfortunately their chances haven’t

improved much over the last 20 years. In fact, on average, their chances have taken a wrong turn. There was a time when a black hide said enough, but now you need information to go with the cattle to speak for what’s underneath the hide.

The number of black-hided cattle eligible for carcass evaluation to qualify for the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand has steadily increased, reaching 12.1 million head last year, but the CAB acceptance rate remains near its 10-year average of 18% (see Fig. 1). That says the number of lower-quality black-hided cattle is growing faster than the number of CAB-quality cattle. What’s going on?

The problem of diluted quality under the black hide began with non-Angus breeds developing black “purebreds” for various reasons during the 1980s and 1990s. With the phenomenal success of the Angus breed in the 1990s, however, some Angus breeders may have added to the problem, rising to success with the average benefits of the breed more than the specific quality of their cattle.

Those who breed high-quality Angus can truly offer the best of the best — if

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they back an attractive visual offering with key information. To do otherwise is to ignore a basic strength of “the butcher’s breed.” Angus has built an image of quality on all levels from production to consumption, and that legacy ensures our future.

Founded on quality

Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) was founded with the mission of increasing demand for Angus cattle through branded beef marketing. That would not be possible with lower standards than the brand’s eight famous carcass specifications (see Fig. 2), which have been unchanged since 1978.

On the live-cattle side, the greater

demand is not for black-hided cattle, but for information-backed Angus-based cattle. It’s the same way in the retail store or restaurant, where greater demand is for those beef products backed by the time-proven mark of consumer satisfaction, the CAB brand.

Some cattle buyers and consumers are on a slow learning curve. How many buyers still call and ask what percentage

of black hides are in a pen rather than asking about Angus heritage and other data? Too often they are disappointed because “those blacks aren’t all they’re cracked up to be.” If only they had bought your Angus calves.

How many consumers don’t look any further than the word “Angus” when shopping for beef? Too often they are disappointed because they had always heard Angus beef was better, but this was nothing special. If only they had known to insist on the CAB brand, instead of a pretender brand with no mission to improve demand for Angus cattle.

CAB has been successful because of the quality, consistency and integrity that the brand represents — you know what you’re getting, and it’s always good. If you want long-term success in your Angus business, the same plan will work.

Fig. 2: CAB® carcass specifications

Once cattle are visually identified as Angus-type cattle, their carcasses are marked with an “A” stamp to maintain their identities. Only steer and heifer carcasses are then evaluated by a USDA grader to determine whether they meet the specifications of the CAB brand. To qualify as CAB, carcasses must meet the following criteria:

- Modest or higher degree of marbling;
- “A” maturity;
- USDA Yield Grade 3.9 or leaner;
- medium or fine marbling texture;
- moderately thick or thicker muscling;
- no hump on the neck exceeding 2 inches in height;
- no evidence of internal hemorrhages in the ribeye; and
- free of dark-cutting characteristics.

The real thing

Anybody with almost any breed of cattle can try to ride on the back of the black-hided fad. You’ve got the real thing, though, so you don’t have to pretend. Back your cattle with the kind of feedlot and carcass information available through the CAB Feedlot-Licensing Program (FLP).

To build a bright future for the Angus breed, and commercial beef cattle production in general, everyone associated with Angus cattle in any capacity must adhere to the highest standards of quality and integrity.

That will ensure the demand for high-quality Angus cattle, increase the average quality of black-hided cattle in the industry and develop more potential supply for CAB product. Last summer demand for CAB product translated to record sales for three months in a row. With all Angus producers working toward the same quality goal, we can meet increasing demand with increasing volume. Historically, that has meant more premiums paid to producers.