SORTING GATE

Communicate the genetic value of your feeder calves

by Joel Cowley, Angus Genetics Inc.

A key component to the effective marketing of any good or service is the communication of value. As such, the basic premise of AngusLink℠, an offering of the American Angus Association, is to communicate the value of a group of calves to prospective buyers.

For most buyers, feeder-calf value is composed of two primary factors:

1. How a set of calves has been managed; and
2. The genetic potential of the calves.

To address these factors, AngusLink captures management practices through process verification (see "Stand Out" on page 58) and offers a means to objectively convey genetic potential in a cost-effective manner.

Genetic Merit Scorecard

For producers who predominantly utilize registered Angus bulls, a Genetic Merit Scorecard® can be added to an AngusLink offering by assigning three genetic merit scores: grid score, feedlot performance score and beef score. Grid scores project relative value differences when calves are sold on a carcass-merit grid. Feedlot performance scores predict growth rate and efficiency in the feedlot, and beef scores combine carcass value and feedlot performance into a single prediction.

Each score is presented on a scale that ranges from 0 to 200, with 100 representing the industry average feeder calf. As such, potential buyers can expect the group of calves represented by the scorecard in Fig. 1 to not only exceed industry averages with regard to each measure, but also to have the potential for a superior acceptance rate for the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) brand, as evidenced by the *Targeting the Brand*™ logo that accompanies a grid score of 125 or greater.

Powering the genetic merit scores for each group of qualified calves are the Association's dollar value indexes ($Values), which are calculated for each registered Angus bull used to create the calf crop and averaged across the group to arrive at each of the three scores. Derived from the comprehensive Angus genetic evaluation, $Values combine several traits to express the total average economic differences that can be expected in a sire's calves when compared with the calves of another sire. Table 1 displays each Genetic Merit Score, the $Value that is used to determine that score, and the specific expected progeny differences (EPDs) that are used to calculate each $Value.

Table 1: $Values and traits contributing to Angus Genetic Merit Scores

	Genetic Merit Score		
	Beef	Feedlot Performance	Grid
Underlying $Value	$Beef	$Feedlot	$Grid
Angus non-parent bull avg.	130	81	46
Traits included	WW, YW, RADG*, DMI*, FAT, REA, Marb, CWT	WW, YW, RADG*, DMI*	FAT, REA, Marb, CWT

TRAITS: WW = weaning weight, YW = yearling weight, RADG = residual average daily gain, DMI = dry-matter intake, FAT = fat thickness, REA = ribeye area, Marb = marbling, and CWT = carcass weight.

*Not required, but used when available.

Improving the Scorecard

Because 100 represents the score for the industry-average feeder calf, selecting Angus bulls that are near or above breed averages for beef value ($B), feedlot value ($F) and grid value ($G) will result in scores that exceed 100. Breed averages for non-parent Angus sires for each of these traits appear in Table 1.

For those wishing to aggressively target the CAB brand, it is recommended that bulls with a $G of 55 or greater (top 25% of non-parent bulls) and marbling EPDs of 0.65 or greater (top 35% of non-parent bulls) be selected. Sire-identified carcass

Fig. 1: Angus Genetic Merit Scorecard

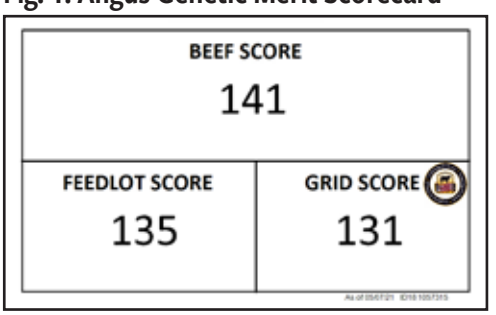

PHOTO BY SHAUNA HERMEL

The Genetic Merit Scorecard box provides a readily identifiable way to communicate the genetic merit of your calves to potential buyers.

data from more than 8,600 records in the American Angus Association database show that these minimum thresholds for $G and marbling resulted in an average CAB acceptance rate of 50%.

Don't forget maternal traits

It is important to note that the traits listed in Table 1 focus on the terminal nature of the calves being offered. For producers retaining replacement heifers, maternal characteristics should be considered. The American Angus Association offers EPDs on several maternal traits, including maternal weaned calf value ($M), which predicts profitability differences from conception to weaning in operations where replacement heifers are retained and the remainder of progeny are sold as feeder calves.

Further, for those wishing to incorporate genetic testing in the selection of females, GeneMax® Advantage™ can be used to determine the genetic merit of commercial heifers for a number of economically important traits, and is recommended for cattle that are 75% Angus or greater.

Communicating value

Fully capitalizing on your investment in registered Angus bulls involves the use of every tool available. Enrolling calves in AngusLink and adding a Genetic Merit Scorecard communicates value to potential buyers. For more information about AngusLink, Angus EPDs or Genemax Advantage, visit *www.angus.org* or contact the American Angus Association.

Editor's note: "Sorting Gate" is a regular *Angus Beef Bulletin* column featuring herd improvement topics for commercial producers using Angus genetics. Regular contributors include Joel Cowley, AGI president; and Kelli Retallick, AGI director of genetic and genomic services.