

DOCUMENTING VALUE



PHOTOS BY MAX STEWART

Left: The goal of the Aug. 10 OAA Angus special sale was to showcase producers going the extra mile to buyers who frequent the ONSY.

rattle off information — genetic makeup, sires, vaccination records, weaning information and marketing claims — documented through AngusLink. The program offered by the American Angus Association combines USDA Process Verified Programs (PVPs) with a Genetic Merit Scorecard® to give buyers confidence in the calves they are buying.

Each time the auctioneer would stop his chant to describe the set of calves in front of him, it became more and more clear: AngusLink cattle caught the attention of buyers and cut through the noise of commodity cattle selling in the general sale.

“This group has a beef score of 161; feedlot, 150; and grid score, 149,” the auctioneer continued, describing a set of steers from Pfeiffer Farms of Mulhall, Okla. “If 100 is average, this is a nice, nice group of cattle selling here.”

AngusLink program cattle proved valuable that day. Steer calves averaged \$10.28 per hundredweight (cwt.) more than similar weights; heifer calves, \$6.13 per cwt. more.

Inaugural effort

This was the second Angus sale the OAA sponsored at the stockyards. Close to 600 head were featured in the inaugural event hosted in November 2019.

The Angus-specific sale came together under the leadership of Roger Wann, OAA director; Jeff Mafi, American Angus Association regional manager; and Kelli Payne, ONSY president.

“This was an opportunity for Oklahoma Angus members to offer their customers a place to sell their high-quality cattle, and put them in front of the right buyers,” Wann said. “It’s safe to say that it worked.”

The Aug. 10 sale is just one

AngusLink program options document, validate value adds.

by Karen Hiltbrand and Katy Holdener, American Angus Association

Hot, humid air rushed through the sorting doors as cattle of all shapes, colors and sizes moved through the sale arena on a warm Oklahoma Monday morning. Groups of three, five, 10 and even 30 were swiftly pushed through one side and out the other. In a quick, rhythmic motion, the auctioneer called out bids, lot numbers, sire groups and other stats on the calves in front of them.

With lunch coolers at their feet and packets of sunflower seeds in their hands, seasoned cattle buyers stretched and got comfortable in seats they had claimed for years. It seemed just another day at the Oklahoma National Stockyards (ONSY).

It was not, at least not for the Oklahoma Angus Association (OAA) members and their customers who brought cattle to sell during the special Angus section Aug. 10.

A little after 11 a.m., the auctioneers shifted on the block

and a new commission manager took to the sale ring.

“Ladies and gentlemen, we have something special for you today,” the auctioneer called out. “We have about 1,000 head of high-quality Angus cattle brought to you from producers going the extra mile.”

More than 1,200 head of cattle sold through the Angus special. Each time an AngusLinkSM group would make its way through the ring, the auctioneer would

Capturing
VALUE

example of AngusLink cattle earning premiums for the producers who have gone the extra mile from a genetic and marketing standpoint and who took the time to document those efforts.

What sets these cattle apart to draw a higher dollar? They've been enrolled in a program to verify their genetic makeup. And their producers spent the extra time on recordkeeping and can verify they've been handled to meet certain requirements.

"When thinking about some of the programs that are available to producers, it's important to go with a program you're comfortable with and run by people you trust," Payne said. "The pandemic this year has exposed a lot of things that farmers and ranchers weren't aware of. They are looking more closely at putting more money in their pocket. When looking at programs like AngusLink, or even just getting started in a preconditioning program, find something that works for you and find someone you can trust."

The AngusLink program offers eight different programs (see sidebars), allowing producers to choose which program or programs fit their management system and marketing goals.

Southern exposure

It's not just happening in Oklahoma City, though. AngusLink-enrolled cattle are seeing premiums across the board — and across the map.

Farther south, AngusLink cattle are delivering the same promises. David Daily of Huntsville, Ala., is not your average cattleman. Aside from running his own successful lime quarry, Daily Ag Products, he also manages his family's commercial cow-calf operation located outside of Russellville, Ala.

Daily Farms was established in 1953 and began as a backgrounding operation, feeding 3,000-4,000 head at a time. Currently, they raise about 450 cows with a target of creating maternally efficient females adapted to the tough, hot

Age and Source

Every animal a producer enrolls in AngusLinkSM must be able to be age- and source-verified. As the name implies, this USDA Process Verified Program (PVP) verifies the group age and source of the calves. Animals must be traceable to the source of origin, and producers must be able to provide records documenting the first calf and last calf born on the operation during that specific calving season.

When Chris Vinton, now a multiple-time enrollee from Nebraska, was looking for a way to add value to his calves, a fellow cattleman recommended AngusLink.

"We were doing it. We just needed to verify it," Vinton said. "This program really does what we need to do to verify to our potential customers that, 'Hey, these cattle have these genetics. They have these vaccinations. They've got the potential to do what you want in the feedyard.'"

This PVP is simple to understand and even easier to qualify for if a producer is already keeping up-to-date calving records.

environment of Alabama.

As a cattleman and successful business owner, Daily could see what was coming down the road for value-added commodities. He knew he needed to intensify his breeding choices and improve his calf crop to capture the premiums he saw other producers achieving.

"I got sent up to Deer Valley, and Jonathan Perry just kind of took me under his wing," Daily said. "He started helping me understand what each bull was capable of and what it would do. He helped me stay focused on the maternal side of things. J.P. has done a really good job of helping me pick out bulls for my operation."

Daily has watched his investment in bulls from Deer Valley Farms, just up the road in Fayetteville, Tenn., lead to an improvement in his cow herd and calf crop.

"I think we've improved as they've improved," Daily said. "Their bulls seem to get better every year, and we've stayed committed to that program and it being a part of ours."

Commitment to programs is what's led to a successful partnership for the pair.

"We're starting to see where those buyers out West are paying us a premium for our cattle," Daily continued. "Year before last, our

cattle brought 14¢ over the board, which in this part of the country, central Northwest Alabama, that's unheard of. Normally you're about 8¢ back of the board."

Western edge

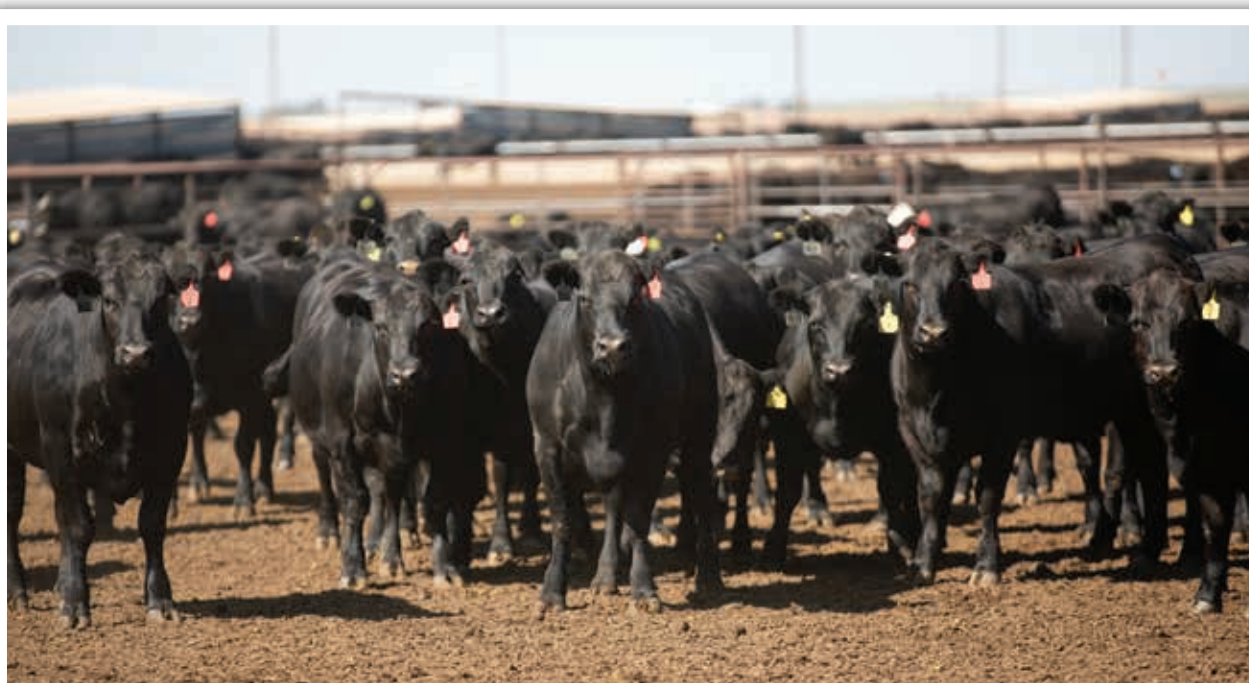
Producers out West are also reaping the benefits of AngusLink enrollment.

Thomas O'Leary of Silver Lake, Ore., manages a herd of Angus cattle in the high desert of central Oregon. He and his wife have offered cattle in the Western Video Auction for the last 31 years, and this year was no exception.

"Even with the pandemic, we thought the sale went better than expected," O'Leary said. "Buyers from Prime Pursuits pushed all the good Angus cattle to the limit, even if they didn't end up buying them (see "Elevating the Game" on page 116). We're seeing the demand for value-added cattle more than ever."

During the sale, the O'Leary heifer calves brought \$0.14 per cwt. more than last year, and their steers brought almost \$100 a head more than the year before. With a bull battery from top producers in the Western states, the family has seen tremendous genetic improvement in their calf crop, giving them the opportunity to move away from implants and

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Farmers and ranchers are looking more closely at programs that can put money in their pockets, says Kelli Payne, ONSY president.

growth hormones, opening up new markets for their calves.

“With our genetics improving, we’ve been able to improve our herd naturally,” O’Leary said. “The AngusLink NHTC (Non-Hormone Treated Cattle)/NeverEver3 (NE3) PVP fits right into that. We can’t say enough about the ease of the enrollment process.”

Getting started

Producers who are going the extra mile, doing the right things and keeping track of their data are already halfway to the finish line. Enrolling in the AngusLink program is a relatively simple process.

“The premiums we’ve seen are worth the time spent enrolling,”

O’Leary continued. “I cannot say enough about the hard-working ladies at the American Angus Association. Not only for getting us enrolled, but then helping us promote these cattle. AngusLink is another tool that we have in our tool chest to help market cattle.”

Back down in Oklahoma, Tom Jones of J-D Claypool Ranch of Ringling, Okla., views the program as a way to keep their records, and to improve the confidence in their calves with potential buyers. The Jones family operates close to 400 cows with registered Angus bulls. Their goal has always been to improve their herd by targeting bulls in the top 5% of the breed.

“We already keep records of birth dates, weaning weights,

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Angus-sired Genetics

AngusLink’s Angus-sired Genetics USDA Process Verified Program (PVP) claim documents and verifies that enrolled calves are at minimum at least 50% Angus. The only stipulation with this form of verification is that the entire bull battery must be registered Angus bulls properly transferred to the producer.

“In working with the Oklahoma Angus Association, we felt like there was a need to raise awareness of the premium Angus-sired calves that we’re selling in some of these barns around Oklahoma,” says Jeff Mafi, American Angus Association regional manager. “Add some genetic verification to them, some documented herd health and the history of those calves to go ahead and capture the added premium and really increase the return on investment for the bulls they’ve purchased.”

See “The Link” on page 54 of this issue to see how much value this claim added to the value of calves at the Oklahoma Angus Association’s special sale.

Cattle Care and Handling

Cattlemen and women across the country take pride in the way they care for their animals and are committed to best handling practices. The AngusLinkSM Cattle Care and Handling claim raises consumer confidence by documenting proper management techniques and showing the commitment to quality within the beef industry.

“We’re all BQA-certified on the ranch, which was one of the protocols, so we qualified that way,” said Chris Vinton, owner of Chris Vinton Ranch Co. of Nebraska. Because he was enrolled in other programs, the Cattle Care and Handling PVP was an easy add-on.

“Where we already did all that, it made it really easy for us to go ahead and decide that, yeah, let’s enroll them, and try to cook up some premium on these calves.”

In order to enroll in the Cattle Care and Handling program, producers must be enrolled in the Source and Age verification program. This program requires producers to complete the nationally coordinated Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) Program certification and for an AngusLink auditor to conduct an on-site review.

It’s as simple as completing the BQA class and sending in a copy of the certificate to the Association.

Genetic Merit Scores

The Genetic Merit Scores[®] feature is the one component of AngusLinkSM that is not a USDA Process Verified Program (PVP). In the long run, it may be the most valuable. The scores are based on the American Angus Association database and reflect the calves’ genetic potential.

The Beef Score predicts genetic potential for feedlot performance and carcass value, including carcass weight, marbling and feed efficiency. The Feedlot Performance Score signifies the enrollment group potential for postweaning performance, including average daily gain and dry-matter intake. The Grid Score predicts enrollment group performance potential for carcass grid merit, including marbling, fat and ribeye. Scores range from 0 to 200, with 100 representing the industry-average feeder calf.

Genetic Merit Scores are an invaluable benchmarking tool that will help producers fine-tune their genetic selection decisions going forward. It is a program that is designed to help producers be more competitive in today’s market and into the future.

The program is offered free to AngusLink enrollees who have predominantly Angus-sired calves.



vaccination records and health records,” Jones says. “The AngusLink program is a great way to keep your records from birth dates to the health of each animal, and a great way to trace them all the way through the feedyard. We’ve used it to track all that information and see where your cattle are at, and continue to try and improve them.”

As an added marketing avenue, AngusLink cattle are included in a weekly email sent to more than 800 cattle buyers around the country.

“We’ve had repeat buyers over the years who have bought our cattle specifically for how they have performed in the past,” Jones continues. “It absolutely does pay to be part of the AngusLink program.”

Adding value to commercial cattle has allowed producers to access new markets and provide buyers with the verification that allows them to have more confidence in the calves. In just this last year, AngusLink participants have garnered more than \$2.5 million in marketing premiums. |

Editor’s note: Karen Hiltbrand and Katy Holdener are communications specialists for the American Angus Association.

Calf Management

The AngusLinkSM Calf Management verification claim is a basic vaccination protocol that documents your animal health program prior to delivery and gives buyers confidence in the information.

“I keep pretty detailed cattle records — everything that we doctor. So, it was easy for me,” says Gwen Whitworth, co-owner of Silver Bit Angus Ranch, Idaho.

Upon administration, it is important that receipts, usage and the placement of the vaccination be documented to ensure all practices align with Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) guidelines. The exact date and number of head that were vaccinated are required to be reported, as well as the name of the vaccinations given.

Non-Hormone Treated Cattle (NHTC)

Cattle to be verified as Non-Hormone Treated Cattle (NHTC) cannot be administered any hormones. Hormonal growth promotants (HGP) may not be used at any time in the cattle being verified. HGPs include some estrus-synchronization products and calf implants like Ralgro[®], Synovex[®] and Compudose[®].

The operations enrolling cattle in the NHTC program undergo an up-front review from a certified AngusLinkSM auditor.

If a producer has any hormones on the farm or ranch at the same time as the calves to be verified, the producer must show usage, inventory and receipts for that product. For example, many cattlemen artificially inseminate (AI) their cows. Even though those products are not for the calves, they still have to document usage on all because the products were on the premises during the lifespan of that calf.

“We do the Age and Source, and we did NHTC, and we do the third-party Verified Natural and GAP,” said Gwen Whitworth, co-owner of Silver Bit Angus Ranch in Idaho. “We take great care of our cattle or we wouldn’t be in business. And it’s just having a certificate that someone else agrees that we do.”

NeverEver3 (NE3)

The NeverEver3 (NE3) verified claim takes the NHTC program one step further. This program is more extensive. Also known as Verified Natural, this is not a stand-alone verification. This enrollment is made in conjunction with the NHTC verification used by AngusLinkSM.

NeverEver3 means the cattle enrolled have never received antibiotics, animal byproducts or hormones. If any of these products are purchased, documentation must be maintained on their usage for all cattle on the farm or ranch. Basically, documented proof is needed to ensure only approved products are being used and the on-farm use of disqualifying products is documented.

“When we call up a buyer and say, okay, we’ve got these cattle and we love to hear him say, well, they bring too much money. I can’t afford your cattle,” says Gwen Whitworth, co-owner of Silver Spur Ranch. “I would say for people not to be afraid to take the extra steps, and do go through the paperwork, and the interviews. It’s definitely worth it when you’re done with it.”

Global Animal Partnership

Global Animal Partnership, or GAP, is a multifaceted program that emphasizes animal welfare and percent of life spent on pastures or range components.

“GAP may not fit everyone’s management system, but the cattle qualifying for certification have enjoyed significant premiums over time,” says Troy Marshall, director of commercial industry relations for the American Angus Association. “Most of the GAP cattle are targeted for Whole Foods.”

GAP is a framework that supports farmers and rewards them for intentional stewardship and management practices. GAP is not part of AngusLink; rather, the Association has partnered with EarthClaims to facilitate a dual auditing system. GAP is verified through an independent third party.

AngusLink is the only option on the market that offers enrollment pricing for for GAP, NHTC and NE3 in one bundle.