



THE SAME SANDBOX

BIF President Matt Perrier shares benefits, direction of across-industry organization.

Story & photos by Miranda Reiman, senior associate editor

As Angus breeder Matt Perrier heads off to a Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) meeting, he feels guilty the whole time. With all the work on his to-do list and a full family life, there's always something he should be doing at home.

However, by the time Perrier pulls back into his Eureka, Kan., ranch, he knows he was exactly where he needed to be.

"We're fighting the tactical battles from sunup to sundown, and we don't get a chance to step back and look at the strategic challenges that we need to look at long-term to help us, to help our customers and the whole industry," Perrier says. "It helps me have a better perspective and hopefully work with our customers and counterparts to explain what can be, not just what is today."

He is the fourth generation to sell "practical, profitable genetics"

— a tagline similar to one his great-grandpa coined, but one he and his family carry on at Dalebanks Angus. That kind of longevity comes in making sure the cattle they create fit the industry, which comes from knowing more about the business as a whole.

"Our focus is much like our commercial customers': to raise good cows that raise good calves that then go on and are harvested for *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) at a high percentage rate," he says.

That means employing all the typical tools and traditions that have served them well, but also

looking toward new and better ways, too.

Enter: BIF membership.

A good balance

As a newcomer to the organization, Perrier got elected to the board of directors in 2016 and took the helm as president at the organization's annual meeting in June.

"I've always watched BIF from afar and appreciated the vision and the mission that they have and the way that they bring together the research and academic communities within the beef industry into the production and breed association world, as well," he says.

In a room full of geneticists and researchers, Perrier says he wasn't always sure where he fit.

"At first I had this 'deer in the headlights' look, like there's no

way that I can even begin to relate to some of these folks and how smart they are," Perrier says.

He sat next to scientific minds like Mark Thallman of the U.S. Meat Animal Research Center (USMARC) at Clay Center, Neb.

"In true BIF spirit, they dumb themselves down enough that he can explain it to me, and I study and follow and ask enough questions that I can hopefully bring my game up just enough that I can add some practical knowledge."

The leadership is made up of representatives from dues-paying breed associations, universities, industry representatives and those in production. Of the 20-person board, currently 10 are cattlemen.

"It's a fun group to be involved with just because it's a chance for us as producers to sit down and hear from, converse with, ask questions of the folks that are either helping evaluate the next set of genetic predictions that we need or formulated the first ones that we used," he says.

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It's not all one-way learning, either.

"It's good to have producer involvement so that we can kind of be the beta testers of some of these cutting-edge genetic predictions and tools, genetic selection tools that are available coming down the pike," Perrier says.

They interject some practical know-how into the conversations.

Building from a strong history

BIF will go through a strategic planning process this fall, looking toward its role in the evolving genetic landscape. Historically, the group guided the industry through transformations like the inception of expected progeny differences (EPDs) and, several decades later, incorporating genomics into those measures. The future promises even more change.

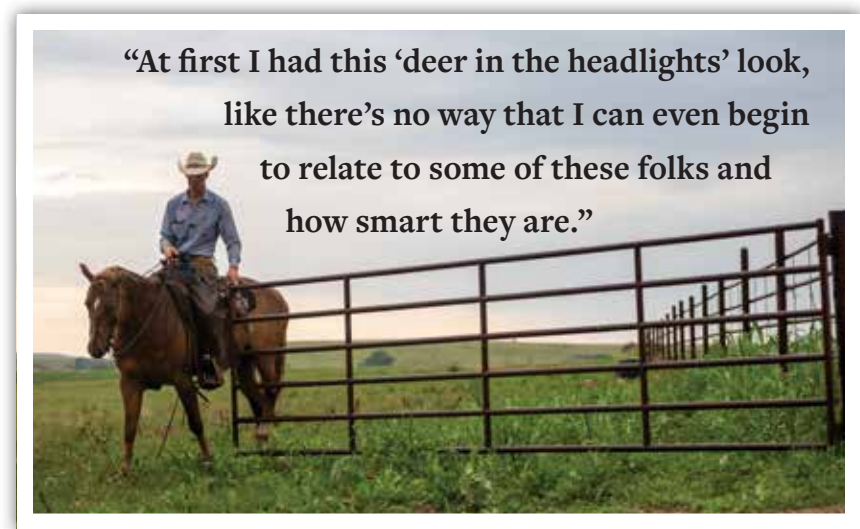
"We have picked the low-hanging fruit — collecting birth weight, weaning weight, yearling weight, ultrasound traits and

things like this," he says, noting the highly heritable traits produce fairly predictable tools today.

"We're at a point that we have some traits that we all know are important — reproductive efficiency or even looking at methane emissions and some stuff away down the line — things that are probably very important, but are a lot harder to collect the data on," Perrier says. "These next tools are going to be a lot harder to develop, more costly and probably longer-term in their scope than what the initial EPDs and genetic predictions were."

The business has already shifted considerably from the days when genetic research was highly concentrated in academia and breed associations to now include private companies in that space.

"It's interesting that BIF has a history of doing a very commendable job of sharing and sharing alike in an industry where we don't always play well in each



other's sandbox," Perrier says. "That's kind of been the unwritten rule: There's a lot of cooperation. That's something that might be as unique as anything else we do — the fact that we can bring competitors together and hopefully improve the industry for all of us."

Seedstock suppliers who may sell against each other in the same region share the same board table. Researchers who might compete for the same grants share ideas back and forth, and breed

associations are all looking at things from someone else's point of view.

The more opinions in the room, the more diversity. That adds to the body of knowledge and is something intangible that Perrier takes home.

"With any decision we make, diverse perspectives are a good thing," he says.

Pulling into his driveway after a few days away, he indeed has more of those. Mark one for the "worth it" category. ■