

CAB CONNECTION

Brand logo + Link score = Marketing power

by Justin Sexten, Certified Angus Beef LLC



You've seen the ads, maybe even watched a group of cattle trade with an Angus LinkSM feeder-cattle scorecard (see Fig. 1). These information tools offer three scores on the cattle, each reflecting a different segment of the group's genetic merit. The beef score is a combination metric for feedlot and carcass performance; the feedlot score breaks out postweaning growth and efficiency, while the grid score predicts carcass merit related to marbling, fat and ribeye area.

Beyond those scores, you may have noticed that some — but not all — groups carry the *Targeting the Brand* logo. With record-high annual *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) brand sales for more than a decade and producers receiving \$75 million in CAB grid premiums in 2017, you can see why sellers want to call attention to feeder cattle more likely to qualify for the brand. Just as logically, you can see why buyers want to find such cattle.

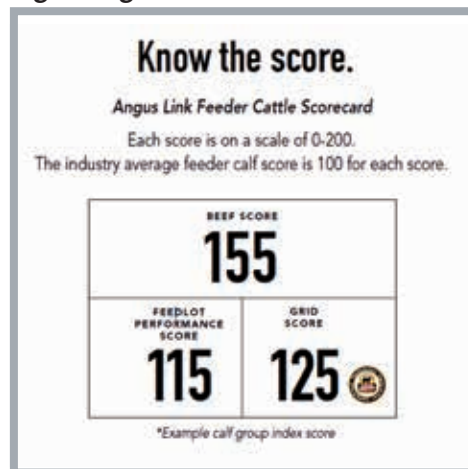
Let's review what it takes: Angus-phenotype cattle must be harvested at a licensed packer and meet all 10 carcass specifications. Only a few of those can be addressed in live cattle, but to help buyers find the "CAB kind" to feed, the Angus Link program uses CAB's *Targeting the Brand* logo. It designates lots where calves achieve a grid score of 125 or greater and the entire group meets the criteria for Angus type as defined by the American Angus Association's "GLA" (Government Live Angus) specification.

"Why use the grid score?" you may ask. Because it selects for traits needed to qualify and most closely

reflects the reasons cattle fail to make the brand. As noted, a few of the 10 CAB carcass specs have a greater influence on acceptance rates than others (see Table 1). The table of "defect rates" shows the share of time each trait was at least one of the reasons a carcass was not certified. Some carcasses fail for multiple reasons, so percentages exceed 100.

With most carcasses excluded for lack of marbling, why not just use a marbling predictor? Because the ideal feeder calf must do more

Fig. 1: Angus LinkSM scorecard



than just grade. With excessively large ribeyes and heavy carcass weights coming in as second and third in line for reasons cattle fail to make CAB, the Angus Link grid score puts value on weight gain until 1,050 pounds (lb.) and ribeyes up to 16 square inches with a lower limit of 10. Even though excessively fat carcasses represent a very small

Table 1: Percent of times carcass characteristics prevent CAB certification

Inadequate marbling	92.6%
Larger than 16-square-inch ribeye area	11.2%
Greater than 1,050-lb. carcass weight	9.1%
One inch of back fat or greater	3.5%
Less than 10-square-inch ribeye area	0.4%

SOURCE: Based on 2016 *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) consist study.

share of those excluded, the grid score favors leaner cattle with more desirable yield grades.

Given this complex combination of traits required of feeder calves with the potential to qualify for CAB, the grid score simply offers the best signal to buyers who want calves that can grade with minimum back fat and moderate carcass weight and ribeye area.

Shift to the how

Now that we know why, let's shift to how your cattle can achieve a grid score above 125 and earn a *Targeting the Brand* logo on their marketing document. First, remember that to meet those GLA phenotypic requirements, all calves in the group need to be predominantly black-hided with no white above the flank or breaking the midline.

Prior to Angus Link, our *Targeting the Brand* logo was used by seedstock suppliers to denote which bulls carry genetics that can sire calves more likely to be accepted for the brand. That use continues today: registered Angus bulls above the breed average of 0.53 for marbling expected progeny difference (EPD)

and grid value index (\$G) at \$33.97 can carry the *Targeting the Brand* logo.

It's relatively simple to produce calves that can achieve the 125 grid score if you start with bulls so designated and build up the herd. Choose bulls that meet or exceed the requirements, and then keep heifers out of those sires. That second step is critical, because the cow herd plays a part in the score, as well. Longtime buyers of *Targeting the Brand* bulls who have retained females with comparable genetic merit are in the best position to market calves carrying that logo from the beginning. Those just now turning their focus to carcass genetics should look beyond the breed-average minimums and increase their thresholds to make noticeable improvements because, remember, genetic change is slow.

If you're looking to improve your Angus Link feeder-cattle grid score down the road, now is the time to start. Where sire information is unknown on potential replacements, consider genomic testing to sort off heifers that will lower the future cow herd's average carcass merit.

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Friday, November 9, 2018
8th Annual

ARCADIA BLACK & WHITE BULL SALE
Arcadia Stockyard, Arcadia, FL
Featuring: Angus
Charolais Bulls • Charolais X Angus
Brahman 2-year-old bulls

Friday, December 7, 2018
13th Annual

IT'S ALL BLACK & WHITE BULL AND FEMALE SALE
Montgomery Stockyard, Montgomery, AL
Featuring: Angus
ChiAngus • SimAngus Bulls
Charolais and Charolais X Angus bulls
Commercial Females

Saturday, February 23, 2019
4th Annual

BLACK & WHITE SPRING FORWARD SALE
Montgomery Stockyard, Montgomery, AL
Featuring: Angus
Charolais • SimAngus bulls
Registered Charolais and Angus Females

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There are many factors in selecting replacements, and there's no need to single out carcass merit — just don't select against it by retaining those below-average females. Similarly evaluate the cow herd this fall. If you're selling bred cattle, consider improving your future scores by culling cows or even known matings likely to result in calves below average for carcass traits. We've been discussing the grid score, but you can apply much of this advice to build feedlot and beef scores, as well. Culling, while not the largest source of genetic improvement, does offer the fastest opportunity to make herd changes other than sire selection.

For fall-calving herds, the sires turned out this winter will influence marketing scores 18 months from now. Spring-calving herds purchasing sires this coming season are looking at a change to scores used for marketing calves two years from now.

While you may not plan to use the Angus Link program to enhance your feeder-cattle program this year, genetic decisions affect the

Targeting the Brand
+ Angus Link's grid score
= Marketing power

long term. Improvement is slow when you consider the challenge of balancing other traits with those important at the ranch level.

As quality grade continues to improve across the beef industry, the challenge of keeping up with average grows. Previously, cattle feeders were somewhat reliant on above-average cattle paying for those that didn't make the grade. As the ability to transmit genetic potential to the marketplace moves further down the supply chain, make sure you're positioning your herd to be on the right side of average. |



To help buyers find the "CAB kind" to feed, the Angus Link program uses CAB's Targeting the Brand logo to designate groups of calves meeting the brand's live specs that achieve a grid score of 125 or greater.