Sorting Gate

Backing up the black hide.

by Kelli Retallick-Riley, Angus Genetics Inc.

The Angus breed has long been recognized as a valuable contributor to the commercial cow-calf and feeder-cattle industry. With its superior genetics and performance, the Angus breed has proven to be a profitable investment for ranchers and feedlot operators alike.

One of the primary reasons for this success is the use of genetic tools like expected progeny differences (EPDs) and dollar value indexes ($Values), which are powerful tools used to predict an animal's genetic potential as a parent for various traits to improve the next generation. When it comes to selecting cattle for commercial purposes, these tools can be particularly useful in identifying future herd sires with superior genetics for specific traits, such as growth, carcass quality and maternal ability.

By selecting cattle with superior EPDs for these traits, producers can improve the performance and profitability of their herd.

Angus breeders have developed $Values — composite indexes that combine multiple EPDs into a single value representing an animal's overall profitability. For example, the beef value index ($B) combines growth and carcass traits, considering both their costs and revenue generation, to target animals that are the most profitable for the feeding industry. Using $Values, commercial producers can easily identify animals that offer the most economic value for their operation and thereby improve the profitability of their herd.

Next step

As a feeder-cattle buyer, would it not be great to be able to target more groups of feeder cattle from herds you know have the genetic potential to gain and grade?

In 2018, the Association released the AngusLink[SM] Genetic Merit Scorecard® (GMS) to provide the feeder-cattle industry with transparency without large additional costs to the cow-calf operator. The scorecard aggregates the genetic value of groups of feeder cattle based on current and historical bull batteries in addition to the genetic makeup of the cow herd. The scoring system utilizes third-party across-breed adjustments to compare all breed types.

The scorecard provides cow-calf operators and those looking to purchase feeder cattle an overview of the group's genetic strengths and weaknesses. This allows them to identify feeder cattle that are likely to produce higher levels of profitability in the feedlot and when they are hung on the rail. Three scores are available: Feedlot Performance Score, Grid Score and Beef Score.

▶ *Feedlot Performance Score* signifies the enrollment group's potential for postweaning performance in the feedlot considering average daily gain and intake.

▶ *Grid Score* predicts the enrollment group's performance potential for carcass grid merit, referencing degree of marbling, fat deposition and ribeye area.

▶ *Beef Score* combines both the potential for overall feedlot performance and carcass value into one number.

Fig. 1: Variation in quality grade by GMS Beef Score.
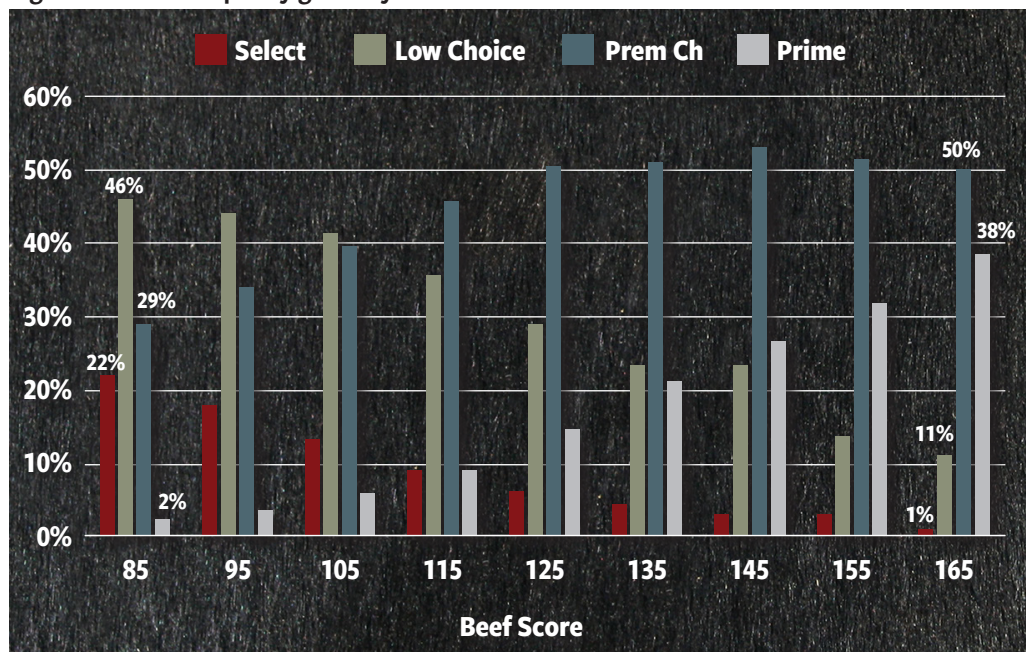
Scores range from 0 to 200, with 200 being the best and 100 being the industry average.

Feeder cattle enrolled in AngusLink with a GMS can also earn Certified Angus Beef's (CAB's) prestigious *Targeting the Brand™* logo, which symbolizes groups that are predicted to achieve at least a 50% CAB® acceptance rate.

But does it work?

Validation

Since inception, the Commercial Programs team at the American Angus Association has been gathering data to validate how well the Genetic Merit Scorecard pulls apart the phenotypic differences of these cattle after they are hung on the rail. Fig. 1 (see page 29) depicts how the variation in quality grade differentiates as Beef Score continues to inch near 200 for more than 115,000 head that were scored and then subsequently analyzed in this example.

Validation data show the scores work, as the variation in quality grade differentiates as the Beef Score inches closer to 200. Moving from a score of 85 to 165 decreases the percentage of USDA Select carcasses from 22% to only 1% and increases the number of Prime carcasses from 2% to 38%. That's a real value difference.

Wrapping up

The AngusLink program and the Genetic Merit Scorecard are game-changing tools for anyone invested in creating, feeding and harvesting profitable, quality-driven cattle. By using these tools, purchasers of feeder cattle can easily identify groups with superior genetics and optimize their profitability.

The black hide is a great starting point for narrowing down your search. But by overlaying it with the Genetic Merit Scorecard, you can hone in on the absolute best black-hided genetics. This is a powerful combination that provides a layer of risk mitigation when soliciting feeder cattle — whether directly from a cow-calf operation, a sale barn or a video livestock auction.

Don't miss out on the opportunity to maximize your investment and take advantage of these valuable tools. ABB

Editor's note: Authored by AGI staff, "Sorting Gate" is a regular *Angus Beef Bulletin* column featuring herd improvement topics for commercial producers using Angus genetics. For additional information on performance programs available through the American Angus Association and AGI, *visit www.angus.org* and select topics under the "Management" tab.