

World Angus Evaluation Improves U.S., Australian, Canadian EPDs

Led by AGI, the three-country evaluation releases updates for growth, carcass and maternal measures.

by Sarah Kocher, American Angus Association

The American Angus Association, the Canadian Angus Association and Angus Australia have joined forces to analyze the breed's genetics globally and create an international tool for genetic comparison — the World Angus Evaluation (WAE). Angus Genetics Inc. (AGI) leads the WAE research efforts, using data from the three groups to improve accuracies for 13 expected progeny differences (EPDs).

“That influx of really good, high-quality data is just going to strengthen our predictions, strengthen our accuracies, and really improve the robustness of our evaluation,” says Smitty Lamb, Board member of the American Angus Association.

Traits included in the October 2023 WAE release are calving ease direct (CED), calving ease maternal (CEM), birth weight (BW), weaning weight (WW), yearling weight (YW), maternal milk (Milk), scrotal circumference (SC), claw set (Claw), foot angle (Angle), marbling (Marb), carcass weight (CW), ribeye area (RE) and fat thickness (Fat). Claw and Angle have been conducted as a three-country evaluation since 2020.

“Putting all the data together leverages each association's database really well,” says Kelli Retallick-Riley, president of AGI. “We want to make sure that when Angus producers, no matter what country they're in, go to sell a bull or go to purchase genetics, they have access to comparable EPDs.”

The United States, Canada and Australia have engaged in the trade of beef cattle genetics for many years. However, it has not

been easy for breeders to translate how an animal from one country scores under another country's evaluation system, says Mark McCully, CEO of the American Angus Association.

The common currency created through the WAE will support trade activity and simplify comparing animals' EPD values.

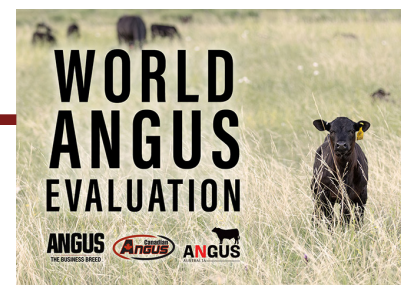
“We're trying to empower our breeders and give them choices,” McCully says. “We want to make sure as a breed association that we're well-positioned to make sure our breeders can be successful with the data that they want to use.”

More data, better tools

Myles Immerkar, CEO of the Canadian Angus Association, cites birth weight EPDs as an example of increased efficiency and accuracy of evaluations, where more data points create better tools. He estimates the Canadian Angus Association has about 1.2 million birth weight records, while the WAE considers 9 million records.

Sharing data with one another helps all three groups in cases where data on a trait is difficult and expensive to collect, McCully says. For example, combining forces allows genetic evaluation for carcass traits to become more robust while avoiding additional costs for data collection.

“Our global initiative is a great step forward for the global Angus community and something we're really grateful being part of,” says Christian Duff, Angus Australia's general manager of genetic improvement.



Benefit of collaboration

High-quality research on tough questions often requires collaboration at an international level. A geneticist with AGI, André Garcia says outside of the WAE the teamwork between entities has allowed valuable discussions about their overlapping work during monthly meetings.

“It's really fun to be able to work with partners that you trust, you enjoy working with, and that all have similar objectives when it comes to the success of Angus cattle around the world,” Retallick-Riley says.

Duff notes that while his members have been looking forward to the release, he knows there will also be questions about it. In response, member outreach and education will be ongoing.

The associations assure their members the WAE will not change data collection or reporting procedures. Also, their data submissions are being treated with the same care for the WAE as they would be for any other tool or research project.

Retallick-Riley says the group has been doing the research for the project for about five years to ensure proper testing and validation was conducted prior to its release. To learn more, watch the Angus University webinar recording on the topic at bit.ly/AngusU1023recording.

A WAE Global Sire Summary search tool is available at bit.ly/GlobalSireSummary. ABB

Editor's note: Sarah Kocher is a communications specialist for the American Angus Association.