



The Angus Link

by **JIM SHIRLEY**, director of commercial programs and vice president of industry relations, American Angus Association

Programs in place to assist with changing industry

I recently read in *BEEF* magazine some interesting facts regarding beef production in the United States today compared to 50 years ago. The article stated that total beef production doubled from 13.2 billion pounds (lb.) to 27 billion lb. with a herd size almost identical to that of 1955. The article went on to say that the consumer cost per pound of beef decreased 26% when adjusted for inflation during the same period.

As I read those facts I wondered what the next 50 years might hold for beef production. My guess is that the genetic improvements and the gains in production efficiency we have witnessed during the last 50 years will not be repeated in the next half century. I assume that at some time there must be a point where we reach an optimum level of growth for a particular environment. If that is the case, what major changes will occur in the future? My answer is that I don't have a clue.

However, I do think we'll see some changes that are occurring today continue into the near future.

- Most of you are aware that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) presented a timeline for implementation of a National Animal Identification System (NAIS). The timeline calls for the program to be

fully operational by January 2009.

There is no doubt that national identification (ID) will be part of our future — even if there are a lot of questions yet to be answered.

- Another trend I believe will continue is the desire of our customers for our product to be source-verified. The demand for source verification is being driven by some of the biggest users of our products, so it is bound to be part of our future.
- Also, if the information we read and hear regarding the opening of the Japanese market is true, age verification will be a part of the future of the industry.

Angus options

If these three changes — national ID, source verification and age verification — become standard production practices in the beef industry, the American Angus Association has in place programs that will help producers participate and profit from them. They include the AngusSourceSM program and Beef Improvement Records (BIR) tags.

Many of you are familiar with the AngusSource program. Started less than two years ago, the program has enjoyed excellent acceptance, with more than 83,000 head of cattle enrolled.

Because of the need for documented age and source information on feeder cattle and replacement heifers, the Association has applied to the USDA for the program to become a Process Verified Program (PVP). If approved, source, age and genetics will be verifiable information through the program. Producers will continue to be able to list valuable management and sale information on the program document, though this information will not be process-verified.

If AngusSource becomes a PVP program, it will add value for the cattle or product at every level of the beef production chain. Feeders, packers and end-product users can all benefit from the information that will be shared about the cattle.

The new tag offered by the Association is the BIR tag. It will allow producers whose cattle do not qualify for the AngusSource program to utilize the efficiencies of a radio frequency ID (RFID) tag and hopefully meet the needs of national ID.

Program details

The AngusSource program is a tagging and marketing program that will convey source, genetic and process information about either feeder cattle or replacement

females to prospective buyers.

The program is flexible and easy for producers to use. The only requirements to participate are that the producer sign an enrollment form and tag only calves that are sired by registered Angus bulls that are properly transferred into the producer's ownership [calves sired by registered bulls that are leased or calves sired by registered sires via artificial insemination (AI) also qualify]. The tags must be purchased, and the calves must be tagged by the producer of origin.

When a producer orders tags, the source, genetic and age information will be stored in the Association database, and an AngusSource document will be created. The producer may customize this document by adding process information, along with any other pertinent facts about the cattle. The Association will send a copy of this customized document to the producer for use in marketing the cattle and, in addition, will post it on the AngusSource Web site for 90 days prior to sale. The information will be e-mailed to more than 400 prospective buyers and feedlots.

The only cost of the program is the cost of the tags. The visual AngusSource tag is \$1 and the matched pair (visual tag plus an RFID tag) costs \$3.25.

For further information about the AngusSource program or the BIR tags, contact the Association Commercial Programs Department at (816) 383-5100.

Things have really changed during the last 50 years. You can be assured that we will continue to see plenty of change in the near future. Enrolling your Angus-sired calves in the AngusSource program may help secure your future in an ever-changing and evolving marketplace.



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