



# The Angus Link

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

## Don't just sit there; do something

The devastation along the Gulf Coast caused by Hurricane Katrina is truly unimaginable. We see the images on television of people who have lost loved ones or who are separated from family members with no idea whether they are dead or alive. We see people who have lost their homes, jobs and all their possessions and who have nowhere to turn.

It is truly a heartbreaking sight, and all we can do is wish those folks well and try to help in any way we can. It is gratifying to see the generous support of Americans and how they have responded in the wake of this tragedy. It certainly renews your faith in our country and our fellow Americans.

A tragedy like this really puts things in perspective. It makes us realize how trivial our own problems really are. I know that I can be pretty good about complaining and blaming others when things don't go my way. The good thing is that I am married to a lady who will

not put up with much of my whining. Her answer when I start my self-pity act is, "Don't just sit there complaining. Do something." She is big on being self-reliant and taking responsibility for your life — not waiting on others to take care of you or your problems.

### Help yourself to fair value

I hear some folks in our industry complain about not being paid for the product they produce. They talk about how good their cattle are and how they should be getting a premium. Well, I agree we all need to be paid fairly for our product. After all, cattlemen in this country do produce the safest, most wholesome, highest-quality beef in the world.

My question is, what have you done to convey the value of your cattle to your customer? In other words, what have you done to help yourself receive fair value for your cattle? If the answer is that you have done nothing or that you

don't know what to do, the American Angus Association has the AngusSource<sup>SM</sup> program to assist you in documenting valuable information about your Angus-sired feeder cattle or replacement females.

The AngusSource program provides genetic, source and group age information on qualifying cattle, which is very valuable in marketing.

Now, I realize there are plenty of marketing opportunities for black cattle. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has 51 certified beef programs (branded beef programs), and of those 35 have a phenotype specification requiring the animal be 51% black to qualify.

The problem is that Angus is no longer the only black breed of beef cattle. Angus breeders have done such a good job of producing cattle that are in demand that other breeds trying to capitalize on their popularity have turned their breeds black. The AngusSource program provides documentation that the cattle are a minimum of 50% Angus.

This is valuable information, as proven by a study on more than 9,800 calves fed in eight Iowa feedlots from 2002 to 2004. In this study of cattle fed in the Tri-County Steer Carcass Futurity (TSCF), calves with at least 75% Angus genetics returned \$67.93 more per head than calves with 25% or less Angus genetics.

The AngusSource program also conveys valuable group age information about enrolled cattle. Now, this may not seem to be of much value right now, but when the Pacific Rim export market opens to American beef, it appears they will require the cattle to be less than 20 months of age. Documenting age will become very important.

The AngusSource program also documents the source of enrolled cattle. As all of us have heard, some of our larger customers want the beef they sell to be source-identified. I don't believe this is just a passing fad. We can grumble about it all we want, but in the end, if they want source-identified beef, that's what we will produce.

### Easy to enroll

It is easy for producers to enroll their cattle and to benefit from the program. First, the producer must enroll in Beef Improvement Records (BIR). A requirement for this is to read the AngusSource Participation and Program Requirements.

After enrolling in BIR and signing and returning to the Association the Producer Participation Agreement, a producer may enroll calves in the program. Calves must be enrolled by the



ranch/owner of origin, sired by registered Angus bulls and have a known group age.

When ordering tags, the following information is needed: month(s) and year the calves were born, breed of cow herd, and registration numbers of all possible sires. When a producer is ready to market calves, the Association will create a document that lists all the information provided by the producer to use when merchandising the calves. In addition, the Association will provide the document to more than 400 feedlots and list it on the Association's Web site. When creating the AngusSource Document, the producer may customize it by adding any health/management procedures, sale dates and locations, and any additional pertinent comments.

The only cost of the program is the cost of the tags. Visual tags are \$1 per tag, with a minimum order of 20 tags. Matched-pair sets [radio frequency identification (RFID) button plus matching visual tag] are \$3.25 per set, with a minimum order of 20.

As with any program that adds value, there are responsibilities that go along with it. They are quite easy to comply with, but are vitally important if the program is to be effective and accepted by the industry. Appropriate records must be kept for three years and must be available for inspection by an Association representative. If the program is going to add value to cattle, it must have integrity and must be monitored to ensure that the cattle represented by the AngusSource program are, in fact, truly and correctly identified as to source, age and genetics.

If you have any questions regarding the AngusSource program or any other Association program, please contact the Association, as we would enjoy the opportunity to visit with you.

Let's remember to keep the victims of Hurricane Katrina in our prayers and realize that perhaps our troubles really aren't all that bad. And, if something isn't going your way, as bad as I hate to admit it, my wife's advice is pretty good: "Don't just sit there complaining. Do something."

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