

# Up Front

by **JOHN CROUCH**, executive vice president, American Angus Association

## The Angus difference

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), there are 33 million beef cows in the U.S., a small percentage

of which are purebred. Statistics garnered from the industry reveal some 690,000 animals were recorded by breed

associations in the last complete fiscal year. Angus registrations accounted for 43% of the total.

### Branded beef

As of May 11, there were 53 branded beef programs on record with and certified by the USDA. Thirty-six, or 66%, of these programs use the name Angus. Of the 36 that use the name Angus, 10

have marbling requirements of Modest (average Choice) or higher. *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) owns that high-quality market, accounting for 80% of the products sold that have Modest or higher marbling.

The fact that USDA decreased marbling requirements for the Choice grade of beef in 1976 provided the impetus for the American Angus Association Board of Directors to establish the Certified Angus Beef (CAB) Program in 1978. This action on the part of the Association, in my opinion, did more than any other one factor to create consumer awareness of the difference in taste between high-quality and commodity beef. It dispelled the popular opinion that existed in the 1970s and 1980s that consumers would purchase and like whatever beef we produced.

Another fact, and it is undisputed, is that the presence of marbling improves the taste and palatability of beef. Simply put, consumers love it. This brings to mind a comment floated out by our competition suggesting Angus breeders are on a binge toward single-trait selection for marbling. Nothing could be farther from the truth; however, there is nothing wrong with selection for improved genetics for marbling.

### The data tells all

Let us take a look at what the data tells us. The genetic trend for intramuscular fat (IMF) has changed from 0 to +0.09 in the past five years. During this same period, the average birth weight expected progeny difference (BW EPD) has remained somewhat constant, while weaning growth, yearling growth and milk have shown increases. Therefore, the postulation that Angus breeders are selecting for a single trait is without basis. The genetic relationship between marbling and other production traits is minimal at most, allowing Angus breeders to select for increased marbling and simultaneously improve other traits as well. What powerful selection tools we have!

Admittedly, the industry around us is changing as global economic conditions change. Much has been said about change — within my columns as well as by other self-proclaimed scribes. But, some things have not changed. Among those constants are the areas in which Angus cattle excel. Angus are fertile and reproductively sound. Angus females are unequalled in maternal value and mothering ability. Angus steers grow efficiently to harvest. In addition to these traits that are so important to profit, Angus cattle possess those characteristics that improve the quality and consistency of beef. There is no doubt that CAB provides consumers with a mouthwatering dining experience at both the backyard barbecue and the white-tablecloth restaurant.

There is a difference.