



Up Front

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

Pedigree information still vital

Just how important is pedigree information to the well-being of the beef industry? This is a question that has long been raised and debated by skeptics of pedigreed livestock.

Protecting purity

British breeds of beef cattle were imported to this New World called America in the middle of the 19th century. Obviously, the perpetuators of the Angus breed, as well as those of other breeds developed in the mother country, felt that lineage was important. These early visionaries created societies wherein the main function was to ensure the purity of said breeds by recording ancestral information, age and ownership.

Realizing the Spanish-derived animals that prevailed at the time were in dire need of additional beef characteristics, early entrepreneurs imported Angus bulls to America in 1873. This was followed by the formation of the American Aberdeen-Angus Breeders' Association in 1883.

Ancestral records in the Herd Book of the Association can be traced directly to the animal that wore No. 1, a bull called Felix of Boghead, bred by William McKnight of "Boghead," Pitciple, Scotland, and first owned by A.D. Hudnall, West Las Animas, Colo. Of the 5,200 animals listed in the first Herd Book printed in 1886, 2,250 were owned by breeders in America, and the remaining 2,950 animals were their ancestors.

It was not until the late 1950s that the American Angus Association made the far-reaching decision to collect performance information and tie it to pedigrees by way of registration numbers. Thus, a practice was set in motion that would eventually revolutionize the beef cattle industry.

Has its value diminished?

The advent of DNA profiling, diagnostic tests and gene sequencing has enticed some skeptics to observe that pedigrees and ancestral recording does not hold the same level of importance as it did in years past.

It is therefore incumbent upon American beef producers to further improve what they do best. And that is to use effectively every tool in the beef production toolshed.

The results of my observations are somewhat different.

There is and will continue to be value in pedigree recording. It sets the cattle industry apart from systems that simply reproduce strains of living organisms. It provides stock persons the opportunity to combine the wonderful art and skill of breeding livestock with the science of producing genetically superior seedstock that satisfy the needs of commercial beef producers.

Some skeptics proclaim, "Pedigree doesn't mean much when steers

are on the rail." I could not disagree more. Pedigree and the performance information that is tied to the pedigree mean everything. The genetics for growth and composition passed from one generation to another determine exactly what their environment and management allowed these animals to express.

The National Beef Quality Audit (NBQA) suggested, among other things, that the world standard for quality beef is not the Choice grade; but rather, high quality is now associated with *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) and USDA Prime.

It is therefore incumbent upon American beef producers to further improve what they do best. And that is to use effectively every tool in the beef production toolshed: pedigree, expected progeny differences (EPDs), bioeconomic indexes, National Animal Identification System (NAIS) premises identification (ID), AngusSource®, and acceptable management practices to remain as the world leader in quality beef production.

