



Up Front

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

Staying current

Rogers Pharmacy has been an icon in Saint Joseph for more than 50 years. In many ways, this drugstore represents the better of two different worlds. The white-frosted pharmacists behind the counter greet most customers on a first-name basis and go beyond their normal duties to ensure that longtime customers have their medications. And in many cases their excellent customer service has been devoted to three generations of Midwesterners.

There was another aspect about Rogers Drugstore that I cherished — there was a soda fountain and lunch counter where paying and nonpaying customers alike could come for coffee, breakfast, sandwiches or visiting. It had a touch of wonderful nostalgia, a warm, fuzzy feeling that seems lost in most chain pharmacies.

Please note, I said “there was” a soda fountain. Yesterday I was saddened to observe that the lunch counter had been closed simply because it could not compete with the fast-food establishments down the street.

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Regardless of emotion, the ownership had to retool in order to keep the business afloat. And as much as I hated to admit it, the decision was the right one.

In many aspects, the beef industry has gone through the same situation. For many years we thought we could produce whatever kind of cattle we liked, under management conditions we were comfortable with and rely on the consuming public to keep buying our product regardless of the quality.

Retooling the beef industry

As the competition for food dollars

became more intense, commercial beef producers began looking for ways to improve their operations from an economic standpoint and to increase the quality and consistency of beef simultaneously. The comfort and tradition of the lunch counter had to go. Tradition simply will not pay the bills.

For the past quarter century the beef industry has been completely retooled. Research and development funds have poured into the creation of value-added, precooked products designed to fit into a fast-moving, mobile society.

Further, consumer preferences for high-quality, good-tasting beef have changed considerably since the founding of the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) program in 1978. This move by your Association, which was spurred by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA’s) lowering of the beef grading standards in 1976, did more than any other action in history to increase consumer awareness of quality beef.

Genetically our cattle are vastly different than they were a quarter century back. In our rush for excellence, we sometimes forget that up to 10 years ago very few cattle in the Angus breed had been characterized for composition and end-product merit. Since the adoption of centralized ultrasound processing technology in 1998, in excess of 1 million Angus seedstock have earned expected progeny differences (EPDs) for beef quality and lean yield. The genetic trend for intramuscular fat has posted substantial increases in recent years, and in spite of management practices and feed supplements that discourage marbling, the CAB acceptance rate is showing an increase this year compared to last.

Add to these factors the effects programs like AngusSource® are having on the marketing of Angus-sired calves commercially. AngusSource, even in its infancy, is enjoying tremendous popularity among those commercial producers who use the program to verify age, source and genetics of the Angus-sired calves they produce. What’s even better, AngusSource-tagged calves are enjoying a premium in the marketplace.

Some say the business has become too complicated — too much hassle, too much data, too many forms, too many EPDs, etc. And perhaps this is true for those who spent a lot of time at the lunch counter. But for those who view the cattle industry as a business, using the available tools to their full advantage is SOP — standard operating procedure.

We are Angus, the Business Breed.

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