



# The Angus Link

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

## The informed decision

This winter, as I traveled around the country, I have had the opportunity to visit with many cattlemen. It amazes me how much cattlemen have in common, regardless of the part of the country they are from. Production practices may vary, but all cattlemen face the same basic challenges of making a beef cattle operation profitable.

I am also amazed at the amount and pace of change that cattlemen face in today's industry. Admittedly, some are more receptive to change than others, but most who have survived operate differently than they did a few short years ago.

Many of you have recently selected bulls for use in your breeding programs, or you will in the near future. These selections will affect your operation and profitability for years to come. The American Angus Association recently mailed out to more than 36,000 commercial breeders a list of all the registered Angus bulls in their herd bull batteries. Provided with each bull on the list were updated expected progeny differences (EPDs) for all the

traits measured by the Association, plus updated dollar value indexes (\$Values). This allows breeders to evaluate their herd bull battery and will hopefully help in herd bull selection.

### Data-based selection tools

Genetic prediction information provided today has made herd bull selection both easier and more difficult at the same time. In years past, the only tools we had available were visual appraisal and perhaps some in-herd weights and ratios. It was a relatively easy process; however, the results were not always satisfactory, because we did not have enough information to make an informed decision.

Today, we have 17 EPDs measuring production, maternal, carcass and ultrasound traits, and five \$Value indexes. We have much more information by which to characterize bulls, but it is also challenging to put the proper selection pressure on the various traits. The easiest way to make changes in a certain trait is to put a high degree of selection pressure on that single trait.

As we all know, however, single-trait selection usually causes more problems than it solves. The Association's \$Values can be very helpful tools, as they weigh several different traits at one time based on the traits' economic value.

Another important aspect of herd bull selection is to match bulls and their performance level to your environment and management practices, realizing that some environments do not provide the necessary resources for extremely high levels of production. Maximums are not always the best selection criteria.

It is also important to remember that your herd bull selection affects the profitability of your operation, and it affects each segment of the production chain all the way down to the family that eats the end product.

### Marketing opportunities

Bull selection also affects your marketing options when you are ready to sell the calves. Calves sired by registered and properly transferred Angus bulls can be enrolled in the AngusSource<sup>SM</sup> program. AngusSource is a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Process Verified Program (PVP) that documents source, group age and Angus genetics. Using registered Angus bulls and keeping a minimal amount of records can pay big dividends. The records needed to qualify are not

extensive, but they are necessary to participate. The program requires the date of the first calf born to be recorded. All the calves enrolled in the same group will be group-aged to that date.

If you are calving, it would be helpful to record how many calves were born within a given time period. For example, if you check your cows daily, all you have to do is note the number of calves born per day. If you check them less frequently, list the number of calves born during that period.

It would also be helpful to keep a record of bull turnout dates. Recording the bull or bulls' identification (ID) numbers and the number of cows you put with each bull or group of bulls would be good information. Recording the dates of vaccinations and other treatments administered to a set of calves is also helpful in marketing.

I realize this might be a bit of a change from the way you have done things in the past; however, those who want to survive in the long term are going to have to be willing to continually evolve their programs and management to meet the needs of the industry. The difference in selling a commodity set of calves vs. calves that are source-, group age- and genetics-verified through the AngusSource program may not be big, but the results can be.



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