



Up Front

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

Be aware of change

While attending the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) in Denver last year, I visited in the alley with an old-time cowboy about the cattle business in general as we watched the pen and carload shows in the Yards. As a good-looking pen of three walked by en route to the showing, we both pulled out our programs from our hip pockets to see what they were. I remarked that the calves were really uniform and that the data also looked good. I could see right off that I had struck a point of contention with the cowboy.

A growing business

"You know," he said, "used to be this business was pretty simple. All you had to do was come out here to the show, see what bull was made champion, then go home and use him. Nowadays there are so many numbers and figures, I don't know what to do."

This little bit of dialog was brought to mind after overhearing a conversation in Louisville, Ky., while attending the Association's Annual Meeting. While part of the conversation asserted that

Association members and leaders must continually guard against apathy and complacency, the remainder of the dialog was somewhat critical of ultrasound technology and the Association's recent adoption of \$Value Indexes. In my mind, I am trying to figure out just what these gentlemen were saying.

At the end of the day it is fairly easy to stand on the street corner and preach the gospel; however, it's altogether a different matter when it comes to living it. It is easy to expound on the virtues of being progressive, as long as we don't have to change en route.

Reason for today's success

Wayne Purcell, an economist with Virginia Tech, says per capita consumption of beef in the United States was 95 pounds (lb.) in the mid 1970s. Some 30 years later, per capita

consumption was 30 lb. less. Why? The answer is simple. Beef and beef products did not meet the wants, needs or desires of the consuming public.

Almost a quarter of a century later, consumer interest and the public's perception of beef improved, and, along with that, demand and price improved. Why? The beef industry changed what it was producing, and thousands of new beef products were introduced that better met consumers' needs.

The foremost consumer of products produced by the purebred industry is the commercial cowman. He is aware of changes that

are recurring and this awareness is reinforced each time he buys ranch supplies, feed and other necessities and each time he sells cattle. Prudent commercial operators have learned that numbers appearing in boxes on

registration certificates and in sale books have a profound effect on bottom-line economics.

We can't be complacent

So, this being the case, we cannot cling to the way the "business used to be." Technology and innovation have changed the beef business and allowed the American Angus Association to develop tools that can assist producers in identifying cattle that are profitable. The champion may be a superb physical specimen, but unless he is genetically superior in those attributes that affect profit in commercial beef production and consumer acceptance of beef, his fame will be short-lived.

So instead of being traditional in our thought process, let us look at technological innovations in a new light. Let's put the science to work for us.

Association President Minnie Lou Bradley used a quote from Thomas Edison in her inauguration speech in Louisville. It reads, "Change is not always linear, nor is it always painless ... but change and the evolution of thought is always inevitable. You can either be on the front end of change and be the beneficiary of it, or be on the tail end and be the victim of it."

We live in the United States of America. We do have choices. We can change direction. We can meet consumer demands. Just do it.

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—Thomas Edison

