



Up Front

by **JOHN CROUCH**, chief executive officer, American Angus Association

Weathering storms takes community effort

A couple days ago, my wife, Judy, remarked to me that the month of December 2007 was the month from @!#?! — that is, from a weather standpoint.

The storm hit

The warning came early to the people in the Midwest and as far south as Oklahoma and Texas that a winter ice storm was rapidly approaching. While we thought we had taken the necessary precautions, we were nowhere ready for the onslaught of ice and snow that came our way in the wee hours of the morning. It is an eerie feeling to awaken in the middle of the night to the sound of breaking trees and sirens.

Now, during my life I have lived in several geographic locations in these United States; however, until I lived in Missouri, I never experienced rain at 20° F. When the rain finally ended, there was an accumulation of just less than 1 inch (in.) of ice on every twig of every

tree in addition to power lines, buildings and streets.

Some 50,000 households were without electricity and the nice things that go with it — like hot water, hot food and heat. It was far worse in southern Missouri and Oklahoma, as well as eastern Kansas. Suddenly, the luxuries we took for granted were ripped from us much like, but not nearly to as great an extent as, they were from the victims of other natural disasters.

People caring for people

Within 24 hours, relief began to pour into our area from adjoining states. A convoy of utility trucks arrived from Pennsylvania within three days. The crews worked day and night, and gradually power was restored to the area.

Most residents were thinking things were somewhat back to normal, and then came the snow, leaving much of the country under a blanket of 5 in. to 15 in., and it was still December. But, at

least many enjoyed a white Christmas, and that is a treat in our area.

We received several calls from Angus breeders (thank goodness for cell phones and car chargers) relating their circumstances and how they were coping with the extreme weather by working with their neighbors to keep their livestock watered and fed and how they cared for the baby calves that had been born during the storm.

Somehow this did not surprise me to a great extent, because that's the way things have always been with people of the land. That's the reason we have a safe and abundant source of food in America. To excerpt a phrase from a Christmas greeting received from LaVern and Alice Koupal of South Dakota ... "That is what life is all about ... people caring about people."

Industry in constant storm

In another sense, this same scenario is playing out on a daily basis in our beef industry. It seems like the storm

is always coming. Conditions, like the weather, are changing. We no longer have inexpensive labor, fuel and fertilizer. Pressures are being brought to bear on cattle feeding strategies that will ultimately affect our supply of high-quality beef.

Foreign markets are becoming increasingly stringent on their requirements for export. With this, we can no longer be passive with respect to national debate relative to issues affecting the future well-being of animal agriculture.

The idea that each segment of the beef industry can operate independently of each other is rapidly fading into oblivion. We have finally realized that in order to prevail, our industry must join arms and work together as a well-disciplined team.

It simply amounts to neighbors helping neighbors.



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