



Movin' Forward

by **BRYCE SCHUMANN**, CEO, American Angus Association

Lead the breed

The American Angus Association's MaternalPlus® program allows breeders to pioneer the next generation of selection tools while also benefitting their commercial customers.

Measure + manage

One of the most significant elements that tie Association members of all herd sizes and locations is an underlying principle: "You can't manage what you don't measure."

Through the organization's history, our members have made significant, measurable improvements in the way registered-Angus cattle are selected, and in the makeup of the individual animals — all through carefully managed herd records. The benefits are evident in the nation's cow pastures, now populated with roughly more than 65% black-hided animals.

Performance records, pedigree information and now genomic data form the backbone of the Association's genetic evaluation program. Year after year, more advanced data has allowed

farmers and ranchers to compare animals, select the best genetics for their herds and improve the breed across the board.

Late nights spent on the computer entering records, tracking birth dates, tagging calves, taking weights, submitting blood samples — it all results in better selection tools and better Angus seedstock.

Now, Angus breeders have an opportunity to take their commitment to continued genetic improvement to the next level.

Maternal focus, exclusive insight

Perhaps Jim Wilson, a commercial Angus cattle operator from Thermopolis, Wyo., said it best during the Angus Means Business National Convention & Trade Show last fall. Wilson reminded attendees that if you want consistency, predictability and uniformity, it starts with the cow herd.

An equal emphasis on the female side pays big, long-term dividends for cattlemen, both seedstock

and commercial. In that vein, the Association's MaternalPlus program helps producers better identify those females that help pay the bills and propagate top-performers for maximum effect.

Here's how it works. Breeders sign up to submit records through MaternalPlus, a voluntary, inventory-based reporting system developed to capture reproductive trait data in addition to traditional reporting methods. They submit heifer breeding records; and for each inventoried female, calf record, disposal code for cows or reason the cow did not have a calf reported.

Sure, it may require some additional effort in some cases to collect and submit such data. However, the cattlemen and women who do so are leading the breed in growing a valuable database that will fuel the establishment of tools measuring further reproductive and lifetime productivity traits — difficult to measure but important to manage.

In return, breeders receive increased accuracy for heifer pregnancy expected progeny differences (EPDs) tied directly to herd genetics. They gain faster access to preweaning EPDs for calving ease, birth weight and weaning weight from calves of inventoried females and access to exclusive herd reports.

These herd summaries allow them to assess within-herd genetic trends compared to those across the breed, as well as calving summaries and female age distribution.

Now is the time

As commercial cattlemen rebuild the nation's cow herd with quality females, the MaternalPlus seal will help them identify which Angus operations are putting larger focus on managing inventories, submitting data and adding to an important side of the business. Herd improvement starts with data, and building even better-quality females begins with MaternalPlus.



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