



The Source

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Where have we been? Where are we going?

I always like to go home. Through the years I have learned that every once in a while, to figure out where you are headed, it is a good idea to look back and see where you have come from. My parents just celebrated 35 years of marriage, and I was able to go back to Michigan to spend time with my family. I am blessed to have such a strong foundation.

The same is true for programs. The foundation where it began, the decisions that were made along the way and the things that have happened leading to the present all help chart the course for the future.

Let's look at where AngusSource began and what led to the program requirements and marketing opportunities we see today.

A lot has changed in the past five years

The AngusSource program began in the fall of 2003. It was developed by the American Angus Association Commercial Relations Department as a marketing program that would help differentiate Angus-influenced cattle from other

“black-hided” cattle. At the same time, the program would add value to these cattle by conveying important source, genetic and process information to potential buyers.

To enroll in the program, producers called in or went online and ordered tags. For a calf to be eligible, the sire or maternal grandsire (MGS) had to be a registered Angus bull. Cattle had to be enrolled by the ranch of origin, and for every registered bull a producer owned that was properly transferred, they could order 40 tags. The calving season was documented along with health, process and management information. Calves were listed for sale online and in an e-mail that went out twice a week, much like the current marketing program.

As the industry evolved, AngusSource changed to help producers meet the growing demands. In June 2004, as electronic (EID)/radio frequency (RFID) identification became more widely used, AngusSource began offering a matched-pair set to its producers. This tag option consisted of the visual AngusSource tag paired with an RFID tag.

To further tighten the program and make it more meaningful, that summer the MGS component was discontinued. With this change, only calves sired by a registered Angus bull could be enrolled in the program, meaning calves would be a minimum of 50% Angus vs. the 25% Angus possible with the MGS component.

Third-party verification

Then, the industry really changed, and age verification and third-party verification became increasingly important as a means to access marketing avenues. In the spring of 2005, following extensive Board and staff discussion, steps were initiated for AngusSource to become a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Process Verified Program (PVP). Approval was granted in October 2005 for AngusSource to make the following marketing claims for Angus-sired calves: age verification, source verification and genetic verification (minimum of 50% Angus genetics).

Functioning as a USDA PVP introduced new requirements for AngusSource. Producers could no longer go online or call in to “order tags.” An enrollment procedure — complete with producer evaluations, risk assessments and on-site reviews — was now required. With this quality-management system in place, AngusSource had increased integrity and could qualify cattle for beef export verification (BEV) programs and Angus branded beef programs — regardless of hide color.

In fiscal year (FY) 2006, the first year of operation as a PVP, enrollments in AngusSource totaled a little more than 65,000 head. By FY 2007, enrollments had jumped to nearly 91,000, and in FY 2008 the program is currently charting 30% growth with more than 100,000 enrolled. This fall AngusSource will be part of several special feeder-calf sales, and we see an increase in the number of lots being sold through video auctions. We are working to collect and analyze data that will help us determine the return producers are seeing from participation in AngusSource.

What's next?

As we look ahead, we know the program will continue to grow and evolve. Traceability. Documentation. Third-party verification. These things are not going away. With the emergence of mandatory country-of-origin labeling (COOL) and continued discussion about national animal identification, staff will continue to monitor industry demands. We are working to ensure that enrolling in AngusSource will meet all industry requirements and qualify your operation and your cattle for as many marketing outlets as possible.

AngusSource has a short, but proud history of being an industry-leading program known for integrity and as the only industry program that guarantees Angus genetics. With this solid foundation, we look forward to the next five years.