

AngusSource Satisfaction

The Tranel Ranch near Roundup, Mont., is successfully putting AngusSource® to work on a large scale.

Story by
KINDRA GORDON

With a 2,300-head commercial Angus cow herd bred to quality Angus bulls, the Tranel Ranch, located 70 miles north of Billings, Mont., produces a large number of high-quality feeder calves each fall. Owned and operated by Ned Tranel Sr. and son Ned Jr., their calves had built a reputation for which repeat buyers were returning.

The Tranel could have been satisfied with that, but two years ago they added one more marketing asset to their calves — they enrolled them in the American Angus Association's AngusSource® program, which verifies age and source of the calves, as well as their Angus genetics.

In 2006, the Tranel tagged about 1,800 head with AngusSource tags. In 2007, they tagged more than 2,200 calves on their ranch with AngusSource tags. They believe the investment and effort has been well worth it.

"It became obvious to me that Angus is what's wanted in the market, and AngusSource is a way to document what we are already doing," Ned Jr. says. He calls the tag costs for the program manageable. "It doesn't cost any more to raise something that is desired by buyers. You still spend the same for feed."

Regarding the added value for their calves, he says, "We haven't



In 2007, the Tranel tagged more than 2,200 calves with AngusSource tags. [PHOTOS BY ANDY REST]

done a scientific study, and the market has been pretty good the last two years, but if we look at similar calves, we are on [the] top side of that. AngusSource has helped. Is it \$1 or \$5? I don't know, but it's pushing us up toward the top [of the market].

"We are offering a large number of calves out of top-quality Angus genetics, and now they are verified through AngusSource," he says. "All of the pieces have come together. As one auctioneer put it, 'Everything has been done to make these calves as marketable as possible.'"

Industry commitment

Of their decision to enroll in the AngusSource program two years ago, Ned Jr. explains that he saw it as a means to add credibility to their commercial herd.

"Verifying age [and source] brought a third party to our

Tranel Ranch history

Born and raised on an Illinois dairy farm, Ned Tranel Sr. earned a doctorate in psychology but wanted to raise his family of 10 children with ranch roots. The Tranel spent some time in Wyoming before settling at a ranch 70 miles north of Billings, Mont.

During those years, Ned Sr. also built a successful psychology practice in Billings, which he still operates today.

In the late 1980s, Ned Jr., the fourth-oldest, returned home after college and went into the ranching business with his father. "It was then that we started pursuing the ranch at a different level," Ned Jr. says. They added land and cattle, now managing a herd of 2,300 commercial Angus cows.

Trained in political science, Ned Jr. credits that degree to their advancements in the beef industry. "I have a liberal arts degree," he explains, "and the impetus of that is you continue to learn. That's what got us into Angus genetics and the AngusSource® program."

The Tranel split their herd into groups by age. Older cows (4-10 years old) are managed in bigger pastures farthest away from ranch headquarters. They calve in April and May. The 2- and 3-year-old cows calve in April closer to a calving barn, but they still receive little assistance.

All females are pasture-bred using registered Angus bulls. "Calving ease is very important in bull selection across our herd," Ned Jr. says. "This is not a high-

maintenance herd, and weather is a big factor."

Weaning is usually done mid-October, depending on range and weather conditions.

In addition to their focus on cattle genetics, the Tranel have been recognized for their environmental ethics as well. They were featured in an April-May 2001 National Wildlife article highlighting how they coexist with prairie dogs on their ranch without trapping or killing. In 2000 they also teamed up with The Nature Conservancy to purchase and protect the Matador Ranch, a 60,000-acre parcel in northeast Montana. They sold that ranch in its entirety to The Nature Conservancy in 2002.



operation, which adds a lot of credibility. Before AngusSource we were attracting repeat buyers who knew our program. Now, even if someone doesn't know our calves, they know the credibility of the AngusSource program."

Tranel Ranch has sold to private buyers off the ranch, direct through the auction market and in recent years through Northern Livestock Video Auction.

Another selling point was the fact that AngusSource is a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) process-verified program (PVP). "We wanted a program that was established and aligned with USDA," says Colette Madison, who, along with her husband, Web, has worked with the Tranel Ranch for more than 15 years — she as operations manager, he as cow foreman.

After two years in the program, Ned Jr. and the Madisons agree that the AngusSource program has been relatively easy to implement — even on their large scale.

"I found the program requirements to be completely compatible to what we were already doing," Ned Jr. says. "A lot of people tag calves, keep track of

when calves are born, track when bulls are turned out and use registered bulls. So it's very user friendly. It requires some work, but it has improved our recordkeeping."

Colette echoes those remarks. "We were keeping many of the required records already, such as date of the first and last calf born, and any medications or vaccinations that were given," she says. "So we haven't found that this is too hard for a large commercial operation." Though a vaccination program is

not a requirement of the AngusSource program, it does offer a vehicle to help document and market the added value to calves that a vaccination program provides.

Calves at Tranel Ranch are tagged with their AngusSource tag at branding.

Marketing essentials

Looking ahead, Tranel Ranch believes their involvement with AngusSource will continue to put them in a prime position for enhancing the marketing of their calves.

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"We are offering a large number of calves, out of top-quality Angus genetics, and now they are verified through AngusSource," Ned Tranel Jr. says. "All of the pieces have come together. As one auctioneer put it, 'Everything has been done to make these calves as marketable as possible.'"

with a way to verify each of those points," Colette says. "It has been beneficial to market our calves."

Prewitt & Co., a Sidney, Mont.-based order-buying company, has purchased Tranel Ranch calves for many years. Kristen Larson, who works with the company, says they have always been satisfied with the Tranel's calves, and they are pleased that the ranch is also recognizing the importance of age and source verification.

"We are filling out a tremendous amount of paperwork to show that cattle

are age- and source-verified. So, we definitely like to see cattle enrolled at the ranch in a program that helps document these things," Larson explains.

In the future, Tranel Ranch plans to use AngusSource as a means for marketing more of its females as well.

"There was a day we sold heifer calves by the pound in the fall, but with our investment in genetics, these are females that ought to be put in breeding herds. So we expect to put more heifers out in the

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marketplace using AngusSource to capture their value,” Ned Jr. says. He anticipates the national online listing offered through AngusSource will help garner more exposure.

Overall, Ned Jr. has found great satisfaction in the AngusSource program. “It’s a simple program,” he says. “The

investment is not that large, and the return covers those costs.”

He’s found personal satisfaction, as well, saying that after they wean calves, “seeing 880 steer calves together with the AngusSource tag is impressive.”

**Step-by-Step**

What’s required to enroll in AngusSource®? Colette Madison, operations manager for the Tranel Ranch near Roundup, Mont., outlines these steps:

1. The first year (2006) we had to complete a simple enrollment form outlining the basic management practices of the ranch and herd information. This step does not have to be repeated in the future unless management changes are made at the ranch.

2. Each of the owners/managing partners (Ned Tranel Sr. and Ned Tranel Jr.), my husband and myself participated in an enrollment training the first year. The second year it was agreed that only one of us would need to repeat the training.

The training is done over the phone. Items covered include verified points (genetics, source and group age), auditing, AngusSource tagging information, recordkeeping, calving (how we handle this here on the ranch), and bull information (including number, ratio, dates in and out, and number of pastures, etc.). The training takes between a half hour and an hour. It gives the producer a chance to ask any questions that he or she may have about AngusSource and what will be required of them.

3. Providing information regarding the bulls used during the season was done by simply e-mailing a list of our bulls and their American Angus Association registration numbers to staff at the Association. The key is to make sure that all the ownership certificates get transferred into the ranch name and that the ratio of bulls to cows is sufficient.

The first year we participated, we had to play catch-up and get our certificate transfers from prior years completed before we could get enrolled in the program. We had been purchasing only registered black Angus bulls for a number of years, but the need to pay the fee to transfer the registration certificates (\$5 per transfer if within 30 days of purchase; \$12 maximum) had not been a priority until the ranch made the decision to participate in the AngusSource program.

4. Once the above is done, it is a matter of waiting until the first calf is born. At that time, we just call the AngusSource staff and provide the date of the first calf born and send a copy of our records related to that birth. Tags can then be ordered and are received within seven to 10 working days (*see Editor’s Note).

Since this ranching operation has historically tagged only the 2-year-old heifer's calves at the time of birth, we made the decision to go ahead and tag those calves as usual. Then, at branding, the calf tag is removed and replaced with an AngusSource tag.* All other calves on the ranch are tagged with their AngusSource tag at the time of branding. The tagging of calves at the time of branding is one of the few changes that we had to make to our existing practices here on the ranch.

Tranel Ranch has historically kept individual calf records on all 2-year-old heifers' calves only. Other calves are recorded in a more general fashion by herd and location, but not by individual calf born (except for first and last calf born in each herd/location). We keep handwritten and electronic records. Participation in the AngusSource program did not really seem to add any extra work with regard to our recordkeeping.

5. With regard to the vaccination records, Tranel Ranch keeps track of the type of vaccine given to each calf at the time of branding and weaning. This is done by date, number of calves, herd and location. We keep these records electronically.

We have not had to provide these records to AngusSource in order to enroll. (AngusSource has no health or vaccination requirements; however, the program will help producers document these practices to assist with marketing.)

6. At the end of the season, one additional form must be filled out recording all tags that were either lost, destroyed and/or replaced. It is a simple form to complete, and we keep this form with the invoice that we received with the tags.

Overall, Tranel Ranch's experience with the AngusSource program has been a beneficial one.

– by **Colette Madison**,
operations manager,
Tranel Ranch

***Editor's Note:** AngusSource encourages producers to wait until all their calves are on the ground before enrolling. This ensures an accurate head count and that the producer will not end up with too few or too many tags. Producers have to control the program tags and complete paperwork if extra tags need to be destroyed. The program also encourages producers to keep the ranch tag in the calves as a form of secondary ID. Waiting to tag your calves at branding or weaning helps to decrease the number of tags that may be lost prior to marketing.



"Being able to verify genetics, source and age appears to be very important to buyers in the market today. Participation in the AngusSource program provides us with a way to verify each of those points," Colette Madison, operations manager for Tranel Ranch, says.