

Regional Manager Matt Caldwell (right) documents Wakefield, Kan., producer Tim Adams' answers to a series of questions during an on-site re-evaluation for AngusSource.



[PHOTOS BY SHAUNA ROSE HERMEL]

Verifying Value

To ensure the AngusSource® program is accurately verifying cattle, USDA annually requires on-site reviews be conducted of at least a random 10% of producers enrolled in the program. With proper recordkeeping, the evaluation process is simple and provides the added bonus of one-on-one time with an American Angus Association representative.

Story by
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As American Angus Association Regional Manager Matt Caldwell met Tim Adams at his farm manager's barn, the Wakefield, Kan., producer understandably seemed a bit nervous. A participant in the AngusSource® program, he was one of the "lucky" enrollees selected for an on-farm review, and today the American Angus Association was in his pasture to inspect his program.

As a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) process-verified program (PVP), the AngusSource program is required to conduct random on-site reviews,

or re-evaluations, with 10% of the producers enrolled in the program.

"Well, what do you need to see?" Adams asked.

"Everything," Caldwell responded with a reassuring grin. "Oh, we just need to see your cows, your bulls, the calves, your records — all the stuff you used to enroll your calves in AngusSource."

Somewhere between the pasture gate and the bull pen, this review turned into more of a herd visit than an inspection. With Adam's well-documented calving records and herd identification (ID) and management systems, the necessary documentation took a small portion of the time. The remainder was devoted to talking cows — from breeding schemes to marketing opportunities for the 136 calves sporting AngusSource tags.

Simple process

"When you have the proper documentation and records and keep them in a file, the on-site review process can usually be done in about an hour," says Association Regional Manager Vern Frey, whose territory includes North and South Dakota and Minnesota. The records reviewed on-site are the same records that are discussed during enrollment, and copies of many of these records must be submitted to the office prior to enrollment being completed.

Frey has conducted several on-site reviews and says the purpose of the reviews at the ranch is simply to verify that the information submitted to enroll the cattle is accurate and that the producer has met all program and participation requirements.

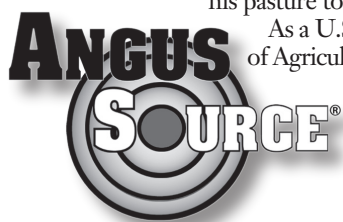
He likes the process because it is also an opportunity to visit with the producer about their cattle and about their marketing options.

Why it's necessary

"During enrollment training for AngusSource we tell the producers they may get selected for an on-site review," Ginette Kurtz, AngusSource program manager, explains. "Most of them say they'd be proud to show us their programs."

Kurtz says officially these are called "re-evaluations" because the producer has already been evaluated prior to enrolling their cattle. All producers who participate in AngusSource must be evaluated and approved prior to enrolling cattle.

During this process, some ranches are identified as having





During an on-site review this summer, Adams' bull partner Craig Good and Caldwell discuss a host of issues, ranging from bloodlines to Association programs and services to marketing opportunities.

management practices that increase the risk of a noneligible calf being inappropriately tagged. These "medium-risk" herds require an on-site visit to ensure only eligible calves will be tagged with AngusSource tags before calves can be enrolled.

Most enrollment applications processed are low-risk herds. Producers can order visual tags or matched pair sets [containing the visual tag and an electronic identification (EID) tag] for their Angus-sired calves following evaluation and training via phone and submission of pertinent records.

The re-evaluation consists of the reviewer going to the ranch to verify that the information sent to AngusSource is correct and accurate, that the producer has maintained the necessary records and that their management practices conform to program requirements. This review process includes:

- viewing the bull battery and calves, as well as records and management practices to ensure Angus parentage;
- checking the age and source of the calves; and
- matching the packing slip for the number of AngusSource tags ordered to the number of calves tagged.

If extra tags exist, they must be identified on an "ID 400" tag reconciliation form and destroyed or, if they are used to replace lost tags, that must also be recorded.

"There's a checks and balances process to ensure that the information documented by the AngusSource program is accurate," Kurtz says. It does require keeping detailed records, but the verification process is what gives the program its value, and the on-site reviews provide an additional level of integrity.

How to prepare

For individuals enrolled in AngusSource, Frey and Kurtz say having a review conducted on the ranch doesn't have to be stressful. The same records that are required for enrollment in the program are the records that will be reviewed on-site.

Here's a quick list of records to have available should your program be selected for an AngusSource on-site review.

1. Calving records. These should be the same records that were submitted to the AngusSource office during the enrollment of the calves. These records are used to determine the age of the first calf born.

2. Registration certificates, semen receipts, lease agreements and bred female receipts. These records will verify the genetics of the calves' sires.

3. The original packing slip that arrives with the AngusSource tags. This shows the number of tags received. The reviewer will match that to the number of calves tagged.

4. The ID 400 tag reconciliation form, which is also shipped with the tags. Any unused tags should be documented here and the tags destroyed. Or, if you need to use a replacement tag, that information should also be recorded on this form.

Reviews are often conducted by Association regional managers or staff, but the Association is also contracting with some private individuals to be reviewers

as well — especially as more numbers of cattle are being enrolled in AngusSource.

Frey reports that he continues to see increasing interest in the program, adding that July enrollments were up 30% compared to last year.

Kurtz also says she was busy late summer and early fall with enrollments. Her advice to those interested in AngusSource in the future is to enroll shortly after calving.

"It is a marketing program, so if you only tag your calves a few weeks before you sell them, you are not going to get the full benefits of the program," she says.

Worth it

Upon review, Adams says that, without a doubt, going through the re-evaluation was worth it.

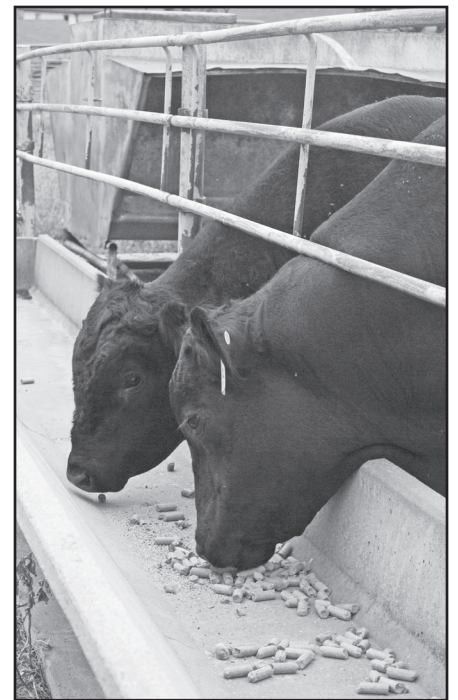
"I want to do anything I can to help make the program a success," says Adams, now in his second year of enrollment.

Adams uses artificial insemination (AI) and coordinates with local Angus breeder Craig Good to purchase genetically superior Angus bulls. Many of his bulls are purchased from Matt Perrier of Dalebanks Angus Inc., Eureka, Kan., who offers to reimburse customers \$1 per tag (up to 20 tags per bull purchased in the Dalebanks sale) for calves out of their bulls, Adams says.

"I'm not spending chump change," he notes. AngusSource provides a means to verify the superior genetics, document his Vac-45 preconditioning program and capture the added value.

Last year, he says, his AngusSource-tagged heifers brought \$1.22 per pound (lb.) marketed as weighing 780 lb. on Superior Livestock Auction.

"I'm sure it (AngusSource identification) made those heifers bring more money," Adams says. "If I were buying heifers outside of my ranch, I'd want to know what the genetics were — I'd want a guarantee."



Part of the re-evaluation process includes looking at herd sires.

This year, hoping to glean more individual information on preweaning growth, he purchased the visual tag-EID matched pair sets and tagged the calves before they went to grass with their mamas. He's also hoping to get back carcass information, though he knows that's not a guarantee. He can add it to the six years of carcass history he has now showing lots with more than 90% grading Choice or above, with more than 40% being accepted for *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®).

Adams says he is tired of his calves bringing the same as the traditional lots of unknown genetics, and he's willing to do his part to make the program a success.

"I want this program to work," Adams says. "You can come every year."



Verifying the paper trail during an on-site review can be done almost anywhere. Here, Caldwell reviews Beloit, Kan., producer Marty Fletchall's (right) bull lease agreement from the front seat of his car.