

Breeding Cattle for the Future: Programmatic Planning by a Breed Association

Larry Dorsey

Director of Cattle Production Programs
Certified Angus Beef Program
(A division of the American Angus Association)
West Salem, Ohio

The final analysis of the National Beef Quality Audit indicated carcass nonconformities cost the beef industry about \$279.82 for every steer/heifer slaughtered in the United States during 1991.

To help cattlemen pinpoint nonconformities and quality defects, and the relative costs associated with them, the first phase of the Audit involved face to face interviews with restaurateurs, purveyors and retailers. According to those interviewed, the industry's greatest challenges are excess trimmable fat, inconsistency, palatability and price.

Using the information learned from the face to face interviews, as well as the slaughter audits conducted in phase two, 43 industry experts gathered for a National Beef Quality Audit strategy workshop. The over-riding consensus of this group was that beef could be made more competitive in price with alternative protein sources if it could be made more uniform and consistent. The following four specific industry objectives were developed during this workshop.

1. attack waste
2. enhance taste
3. improve management
4. control weight

The issue of excessive external fat is beginning to be addressed, all three major packers now supply further fabricated boxed beef trimmed to 1/4 inch or less. This is expected to be the boxed beef industry standard within the next two years.

As packers supply more closely trimmed product, it is also expected they will begin changing cattle buying

procedures to concentrate on cattle with higher lean yield and less fat.

Perhaps the most exciting objective with the greatest opportunity for improvement is genetic management. It is realized that certain areas of genetics are hard to change due to the lack of readily available information. However, genetic improvement can be accomplished using existing resources. Acting proactively, the American Angus Association is utilizing current resources and making plans to obtain information still needed to help the industry accomplish the Audit objectives through genetic improvement.

Based on the National Beef Quality Audit findings and industry needs, the American Angus Association and the Certified Angus Beef Program have developed a long-range plan with strategies to supply the seedstock and commercial producer with information and data to make genetic improvements. Together, the Association and the Certified Angus Beef Program have identified four objectives on which to focus. The following is an explanation and discussion of each objective.

1. Expand the value and use of the Angus performance database.

This includes all EPD's and records for performance and carcass traits. Due to industry needs, special emphasis is being placed on expansion of the carcass database. Even prior to the National Beef Quality Audit, the American Angus Association was working with producers to collect data and identify Angus sires with carcass traits which could improve the acceptance rate (percent of cattle meeting carcass specifications) for the Certified Angus Beef Program.

The following illustrates the increase in number of Angus sires with EPD's for carcass traits.

Carcass Data Expansion

	Sires with Carcass Data
Spring 1990	524
1991	571
1992	616
1993	713

To complement this process, over 50 commercial herds are presently enrolled in designed sire evaluation. In addition, nearly 60 new bulls have been or will be evaluated in commercial cow herds during the spring 1993 breeding season.

Twenty of the top 35 registered Angus sires have carcass EPD's. Additionally, four more are in the process of being evaluated. These top 35 sires accounted for 22 percent of the total Angus registrations in fiscal year 1992.

To provide producers more information about carcass data, an interim carcass EPD program for young cattle was adopted January 1, 1993. The following outlines the specifics:

Interim Carcass EPD for Young Cattle

Methodology

Sire-Maternal Grand sire Model

$(1/2 \text{ Sire EPD} + 1/4 \text{ MGS EPD} + 1/8 \text{ MGGS EPD})$

Accuracy Values

$1/4 \text{ Sire ACC} + 1/16 \text{ MGS ACC}$

Vehicle

Angus Performance Pedigree

Performance Registration Certificate

2. Increase member education activities and improve member awareness of Association programs, activities and educational material that can benefit members.

The American Angus Association has always been committed to maintaining a knowledgeable and active staff to better serve its members. Member awareness of Association programs is continually enhanced through the involvement of regional managers, in day to day contacts, presentations at state association meetings, state cattlemen's meetings and seedstock sales.

Junior activities play an important role in education and awareness of Association programs. Early interest is being initiated through expanded educational opportunities during Junior shows, from marketing activities to carcass contests.

Association public relations activities serve as the main artery to member communication. The "Angus Journal", "Beef Bulletin" and Certified Angus Beef Program's "Synergy" magazine are widely recognized publications the Association uses to educate and motivate. In addition, the staff utilizes brochures, industry-wide advertising and participation in national and state beef-related events to promote Association accomplishments and progress.

3. Make shows more meaningful to the industry.

Placing more emphasis on the end product, National Junior Angus Association members have recently implemented carcass steer shows. By incorporating carcass data collection into these shows, junior members can learn what type of cattle they are producing and relate the information to the needs of the entire industry. Creating this awareness with future generations of producers should allow for marked product improvement.

4. Increase demand for registered Angus seedstock through implementation of a specification-branded beef program that will ensure a consistent product with a high degree of acceptability and palatability for consumers - The Certified Angus Beef Program.

First, and possibly foremost, in accomplishing this objective is to maintain the integrity of the Certified Angus Beef Program and product by adhering to the high standards previously established under the USDA. The Program's phenomenal record of growth and success is

due to supplying the consumer a consistent, high quality product without varying from the live animal and carcass specifications to produce more product.

To maintain these high standards, the American Angus Association and Certified Angus Beef Program continually work with producers to first identify genetics that produce more cattle meeting Certified Angus Beef carcass specifications and then applying those genetics to a normal production environment.

Through sire evaluation and carcass data collection programs, we plan to continue to increase the number of sires with EPD's for carcass data. This will allow producers a greater selection of sires which will work in their environments as well as produce carcasses exceeding Certified Angus Beef product specifications.

Increased industry exposure to and involvement in the Certified Angus Beef Program will be accelerated by programs like the Value Discovery Project where producers of Angus-sired steers can retain ownership of a small number of cattle in a large, efficient commercial feedlot environment and gain valuable carcass information.

Marketing efforts in the Certified Angus Beef Program's food service, retail and export divisions are continually designed and implemented to ensure a progressive future for the Program and Angus producers.

The aim of the American Angus Association is to maintain focus on new developments, needs, and directional changes important to the industry as it relates to commercial beef production, and its acceptance to the consumer. It is our job as a breed association to support research, collect and distribute information for both the seedstock and commercial producers, thus allowing them to make the necessary directional changes based on credible information.

With the implementation of programs using the database and tools available, problems such as the over-production of fat can be solved through cooperation and communication of various industry segments and application of known genetics. The Association is striving to provide an unprecedented coordination among all those involved in producing a consistent, high quality beef product.

National Beef Quality Audit Information Source:
National Beef Quality Audit Executive Summary,
Published by the National Cattlemen's Association in
Coordination with Colorado State University and Texas
A&M University, 1992.