

THE LINK

Adding the Missing Link

by Chris Engel, American Angus Association



At the 2017 Angus Convention, I was sitting in the audience in Fort Worth, Texas, during the opening ceremonies when Allen Moczygemba, CEO of the American Angus Association, announced the acquisition of Verified Beef®. He went on to share that their Reputation Feeder Cattle® program would be the base for the Association's new feeder-cattle program. The program would be designed for the commercial sector and provide a simple tool to validate the genetic potential of feeder calves.

I could see how the concept would have the ability to benefit multiple segments of the cattle industry. The first ones that came to mind were Angus breeders, commercial cattlemen and cattle feeders.

Angus breeders would benefit from increased demand for quality Angus bulls. Commercial cattlemen would be able to showcase to potential buyers the genetic merit of their calf crops, which in turn would give them the ability to further differentiate their calves from those of others. Cattle feeders would be able to couple genetically based performance-potential metrics with live-animal visual appraisal and other subjective information available to identify quality sets of cattle that would fit into their business model.

To be honest, my first impression was that it was a romantic idea, which had been attempted in the past to no avail. I remember asking myself, "What will make this time different than the others?" There was no doubt in my mind that it would be a monumental task with a lot of moving parts, not to mention the added complexity of effectively communicating its value to those segments who historically have cared about different things.

I left the convention that day with more questions than answers. Surprisingly though, the doubts and criticisms running through my mind were stifled with one optimistic thought: "If there is anybody who can successfully do this, it is the American Angus Association," and I couldn't wait to see it.

Puzzle pieces

During the months that followed the convention, I found myself trying to put the puzzle together — identifying different pieces, flipping them over to see what part of the picture they held and wondering if they were all there.

I am a puzzle guy; I have always enjoyed them. Growing up I believed (and still do) that a family vacation is not complete unless the idle time at night is spent with 1,000+ puzzle pieces spread out on a table or covering the floor.

Throughout my career, I have related successful businesses in the agriculture industry — whether a family-owned cattle operation or a global enterprise — to a completed puzzle. Alone they may not have all the resources they need, yet through a network of peers, neighbors and business partners, they are able to collect all the pieces and make them fit together to complete the whole picture.

The American Angus Association seemed to have all of the pieces for a successful feeder-cattle program. The optimistic thought I had leaving the convention last November, that Angus could and would do this, looked like it was going to happen. I didn't want to just be a spectator from the sidelines; I wanted to help put this puzzle together.

Fast-forward to April 16, 2018, my first day as the director of the American Angus Association's feeder-cattle program: Angus LinkSM. The past few months have been

busy, but we have made tremendous progress. I truly believe Angus Link can and will deliver value to all segments of the beef industry.

The basics

Enrollment is completely web-based, and groups of calves or yearlings will receive a validated marketing certificate illustrating their health protocol, any process-verified programs in which they may be dually enrolled, along with other attributes describing the enrollment group.

The certificate also includes the Angus Link scorecard reflecting

including Marb, fat (Fat) and ribeye area (RE).

Angus Link serves as a useful tool for commercial cattlemen to effectively communicate the genetic performance potential of their feeder calves to buyers across the nation. The program provides cattle feeders the ability to incorporate validated genetic merit into their live-animal evaluation process to further manage risk and help them make profits more predictable.

Angus Link enrollment offers commercial cattlemen more than just an ear tag and a scorecard. The

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three scores that predict the genetic performance potential of the group in the feedlot: beef score, feedlot performance score and grid score. The scores range from 0 to 200, with the average feeder calf scoring 100 for each of the scores. The three scores are based off of the American Angus Association's dollar value indexes (\$Values): beef value (\$B), feedlot value (\$F) and grid value (\$), respectively.

The beef score predicts the genetic potential for feedlot performance and carcass value by looking at expected progeny differences (EPDs) including carcass weight (CW), marbling (Marb) and feed efficiency (RADG). The feedlot performance score signifies the group potential for postweaning performance, based off of EPDs including average daily gain (ADG) and dry-matter intake (DMI). The grid score predicts the performance potential for carcass grid merit taking into account EPDs

program facilitates good recordkeeping; helps make the next calf crop better than the last; and, if they elect to make their marketing certificate public, gives them access to a wider audience of potential buyers to help capture value on sale day.

It has been an honor and a privilege to be part of the Angus family these past few months and to serve the Association's board and membership. Angus Link is a testament to the hard work put in by all of the Association's entities and departments, as well as the progressive vision of the Association's Board of Directors and their dedication to improving the industry. |

Editor's note: The American Angus Association offers a host of programs to assist commercial cattlemen in profiting from their Angus genetics. The *Angus Beef Bulletin* will feature two columns to share insights about the programs. Chris Engel, director of Angus Link, will author "The Link." Ginette Gottswiller, director of Angus Source, will author "The Source."