

SORTING GATE

Bull selection with Angus LinkSM in mind

by Angus Genetics Inc. staff

Angus's new feeder-cattle program, Angus LinkSM is live and available. With these scores influencing how cattle are valued in auction markets and in video sales, commercial breeders may want to align their bull-selection decisions with their desired outcomes in terms of Angus Link scores. Three elements really should be considered by a commercial bull buyer:

1. How do the expected progeny differences (EPD) and dollar value indexes (\$Values) available on bulls influence the Angus Link scores on their calves;
2. Terminal vs. maternal needs; and
3. Availability of carcass EPDs.

The pull through

One of the outcomes of the Angus Link program will be increased demand for better-quality genetics. This "pull" in the marketplace is illustrated in Fig. 1. When Angus Link scores identify calves that have the genetics to perform better in the feedlot and on the rail to generate more profit, buyers will be able to bid with confidence, and pay more — everything else being equal — for the genetically superior calves.

With those higher-scoring calves bringing more money, the commercial cow-calf operator will be considering sourcing bulls to increase the scores on their calves. This increased demand will ultimately influence bull breeders, meeting this demand with more

volume and increased \$Values.

As confidence in the Angus Link scores increase, the demand for better calves will cause this demand wheel to spin faster, increasing the quality of the bulls available and, in turn, the value of the calves in the commercial sector.

To best understand how the values available on bulls translate into increased Angus Link scores, consider Table 1. The Angus Link program generates three scores on calves that each range from 0 to 200 with 100 representing an industry average feeder calf.

- ▶ **The Beef Score** represents the profitability in the feedlot when animals are sold on the rail.
- ▶ **The Feedlot Performance Score** represents profitability in the feedlot when animals are sold live.
- ▶ **The Grid Score** represents performance on the rail considering differences in both carcass yield and quality grade.

The Angus Link scores are a direct translation of the \$Value indexes that Angus breeders have had available on their cattle for years. These \$Value indexes combine multiple EPDs and weight them by their respective economic impact to

Fig. 1: The interrelationships between Angus Link scores and the demand for bulls with EPDs that will deliver calves with increased scores



represent a prediction of differences in profit potential.

This makes selecting for better Angus Link scores really straightforward. To improve Beef Score in calves, the commercial operator should select bulls with higher \$Beef (\$B). To improve Feedlot Performance Score select for \$Feedlot (\$F). To improve Grid Score select for higher \$Grid (\$G).

Balance with maternal

The commercial producer who is also keeping replacement heifers will want to consider more than just \$B, \$F and \$G when selecting bulls. That is because these are all terminal indexes that do not consider maternal traits.

Bull selection decisions will need

to balance these terminal traits and indexes that can increase their Angus Link scores against important maternal traits that will influence the long-term profitability of their cow herd. Important maternal traits to consider may include traits like milk, cow size, calving ease and heifer pregnancy.

Carcass component

As expected, an important suite of EPDs that affect Beef Score and Grid Score are the carcass EPDs. What commercial buyers need to be aware of is that not all bulls have carcass EPDs when they are sold. To obtain carcass EPDs on young non-parent bulls, they will need to

have ultrasound measures for rib and rump fat, intramuscular fat (IMF) and ribeye area, along with scan weights. Bulls that have not been measured for ultrasound can still get carcass EPDs through a genomic profile test — Angus GSTM or HD50K.

Bulls with no carcass EPDs can still have calves scored in Angus Link, but instead of the bull's carcass EPDs being used, a conservative breed estimate is used. Most bulls' calves will score better when their actual carcass EPDs are used.

Commercial producers considering enrolling calves in Angus Link, who have bulls in their bull battery with no carcass EPDs, should consider genomic profiling their bulls ahead of time so their carcass EPDs are available when the calves are scored.

Brand logo

Besides the three Angus Link scores, a group of calves can also receive a *Certified Angus Beef*[®] (CAB[®]) brand *Targeting the Brand*

Table 1: Angus Link scores and their related \$Values and contributing EPD on bulls

| Angus Link Scores | \$Values on Angus bulls | Contributing EPDs |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| Beef Score | \$Beef | WW, YW, RADG*, DMI*, FAT, REA, IMF, CWT |
| Feedlot Performance Score | \$Feedlot | WW, YW, RADG*, DMI* |
| Grid Score | \$Grid | FAT, REA, IMF, CWT |

*The feed efficiency traits RADG and DMI are not required but are used in generating \$Values and Angus Link scores when available.



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logo. To obtain this logo, enrollment groups need to score 125 or more on Grid Score, represent the use of sires above Angus average for marbling and be identified as meeting the phenotype requirement outlined in the USDA live-animal specification for Angus (see "CAB Connection" on page 70 of this issue).

To increase the likelihood of calves receiving this logo, attention should be paid to buying bulls that are at least above average for both \$G and Marbling EPD.

One piece

Angus Link is a new tool to allow a direct connection to be made between the price of calves and their genetic merit for economically important traits in the feedlot and on the rail. Just like EPDs, the scores are not a guarantee of performance, as many other factors will influence calf performance, with health being an important point of differentiation. Calf management will continue to play an important role in determining price. Angus Link scores should be



considered alongside these management factors.

When two sets of calves are equal in every way (such as vaccination, weight and condition), the calves with the higher scores represent greater value through increased performance on average. As buyers reward higher-scoring calves, the producers will respond to this demand, which will ultimately influence demand for superior Angus bulls.

Finally, the loop is closed and a direct connection between better bulls and better-performing calves will be made. Genetic response in the Angus breed has been impressive to date, but Angus Link is poised to drive it even further. ■

Editor's note: "Sorting Gate" is a regular *Angus Beef Bulletin* column featuring herd improvement topics for commercial producers using Angus genetics. Authored by staff of Angus Genetics Inc. (AGI), regular contributors include Dan Moser, president; Stephen Miller, director of genetic research; and Kelli Retallick, director of genetic service. For additional information on performance programs available through the American Angus Association and AGI, visit www.angus.org and select topics under the Management tab.

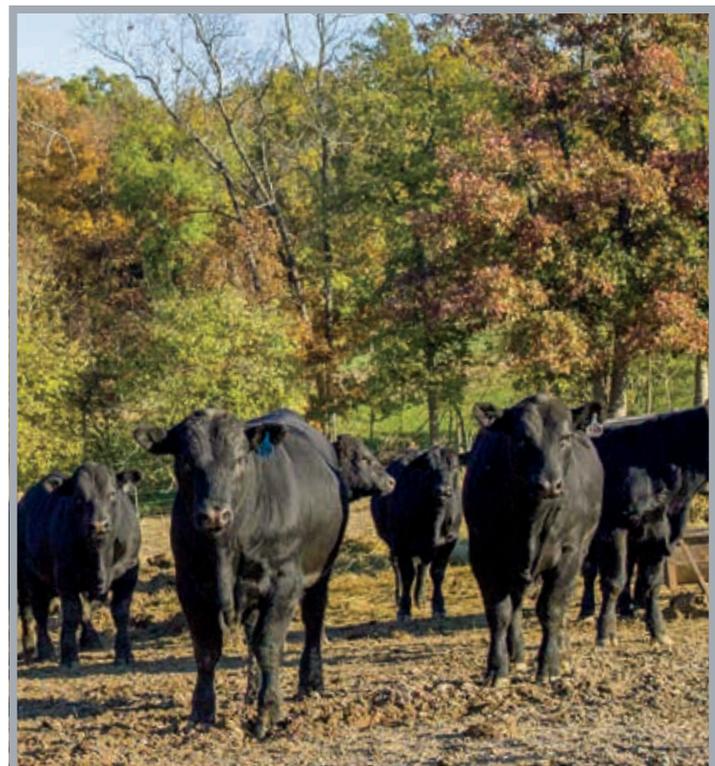


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