



Don't Drop the Ball!

by Greg Comstock,
RAAA Marketing Programs Coordinator

Leadership, Management, Customer Service, and Strategic Planning were on the menu for Young Guns 2, which was held on July 23 and 24, 2007. Twenty-eight Red Angus breeders gathered near RAAA Headquarters in Denton, Texas for the second edition of Red Angus Young Guns.

So You Want to Be a Cattle Feeder

In response to Young Guns 1's request for more "hands on" experience in the feed yard sector, Young Guns 2 featured three experienced, Value Added Feeders, who explained an array of topics to include: risk management, financing, price cycles, grid marketing, and other components of feedlot profitability. Following their discussion, Young Guns attendees broke into groups for an exercise called, "So you want to be a Cattle Feeder". Groups bid against each other to buy one of six sets of feeder cattle and then applied management and marketing decisions. Each group also was dealt an environmental circumstance that affected performance, grading, and/or fed cattle markets. The cumulative effort of each group was run through a feedlot breakeven calculator to see who had made or lost the most as a cattle feeder.



Blake Angell, head of feeder cattle procurement for Meyer Natural Angus, delivers a \$1,408 check to RAAA Executive Secretary, Dr. Bob Hough and Marketing Programs Coordinator, Greg Comstock. The amount represents \$1 for every FCCP tagged Red Angus harvested through Meyer Natural Angus during the most recent fiscal year.

Frank Wedel, past RAAA President, has made a practice of buying customers' calves and feeding them. Frank advised, **"Communication is key. Find out how others feel about your cattle feeding enterprise. Start with your spouse, and include your banker and a psychiatrist."**



Dale Moore, owner/manager of Cattlemen's Choice Feedyard in Gage, Oklahoma is a past Red Angus GridMaster winner and annually recognized as a premier Certified Angus Beef Feedyard. Dale talked on the value of Age & Source Verification and market value added cattle.

Kevin Unger, manager of Decatur County Feedyard, Oberlin, Kansas gave a cattle feeding 101 course and walked Young Guns attendees through the decision making process of retained ownership...pointing out many opportunities to increase return to equity.



Steve Haines, founder of the Centre for Strategic Management, led the group in a discussion of Strategic Life Planning. Steve is no stranger to Red Angus, having facilitated both the current Strategic Plan (Plan 2008) and the original Red Angus Strategic Plan (Plan 2000) which established the need for THR and Commercial Marketing Programs. In preparation for the suggestions Young Guns would be making for areas of emphasis in the next Red Angus Strategic Plan, the group broke into four teams to perform a S.W.O.T. (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis of the current Red Angus Market position. Below are the results of the Young Guns' environmental scan.

Strengths - Commercial Focus, Quality Leadership, ERTs, THR, "Angus" Product Lines, FCCP, ProCow, Don't Chase Fads, Maternal Characteristics & Disposition

Weaknesses - widening gap among breeders in knowledge and technology, splinter groups within RAAA, foot problems, no access for hybrid sired cattle into FCCP, rapid growth of herd size = loss of quality

Opportunities - facilitate use of multi-breed EPDs, demand for quality beef, value added niche markets, people, science driven...not fad driven, tight gene pool, promote cross-breeding, international demand

Threats - environmental, animal rights activists, corn prices, fuel prices, urban sprawl, false [negative] publicity, growth in membership losing sight of core policies, single trait selection, "single-breed" mindset, complacency

Getting Involved...

Leadership development has always been a central focus of any Young Guns or Young Breeders agenda. The aging population of our Nation's cow/calf producers make developing the next generation of leaders a priority, as is the need to ensure that Red Angus will be prepared to maintain its leadership role in the next generation. RAAA Executive Secretary, Dr. Bob Hough, led a discussion with Young Guns on becoming more involved. Principles covered were applicable to both affiliate and national Red Angus associations, as well as other beef industry organizations. Bob concluded with an explanation of the structure and function of RAAA committees and their relationship to the board of directors.

Passing the Reins & Don't Drop the Ball...

At the turn of the century, National Cattleman's Beef Association awarded eight Beef Cattle operations, "NCBA's Cattle Business of the Century". This section of Young Guns featured four speakers, all of whom are members of two of those distinguished operations. Rob Brown was 29 when his father passed unexpectedly, and he shared the experience of being handed the reins at a young age, and some of his life's lessons that prepared him to survive and ultimately grow the operation to its present status. Rob also told how that experience shaped his thinking in passing the reins to his children, in-laws and grandchildren.

Mark Gardiner of Gardiner Angus Ranch in Ashland, Kan., then advised Young Guns "Don't Drop the Ball" once the mantle of leadership and decision making is in your hands. Mark shared some of the Gardiner Angus philosophies that have led to their unprecedented success in the seedstock industry, and also discussed the sharing of roles, responsibilities, and relationships in a large, successful and extended family operation.

Are You Good Enough To Sell Them a Bull?

2007 Young Guns were presented this question in response to the challenge that faces the Red Angus breed during the current phase of breed growth and popularity. This segment of the program forced Red Angus breeders to look in the mirror, and evaluate what they, their cattle and their customer service looks like through the eyes of their customer. Four commercial cow/calf operators were chosen to answer a series of questions regarding their expectations of the bulls they purchase, and the seedstock producers they buy from...**Their answers surprised more than one Young Guns attendee - Here's a sample.**



John Warren, Paxton Ranch, Stapleton, Neb. RAAA's 1st Commercial Producer of the Year

Q: What do you require of your seedstock suppliers?

A: **"Volume of bulls, Longevity, Integrity (accurately represent cattle/data, stand behind what they sell)"**

Q: What percentage of seedstock suppliers are qualified to sell you a bull?

A: **"Less than 25% of those who market 100+ bulls/yr."**

Tom Woodward, Broseco Ranches, Omaha, Texas 2006 RAAA Commercial Producer of the Year 2007 B.I.F. Commercial Producer of the Year

Q: How much emphasis do you put on breed purity?

A: **"Once they get to 7/8 or better it is of little significance to me, the commercial producer."**

Q: Describe the emphasis you place on different traits?

A: **"Cowherd Traits 4X, Growth 2X, Carcass 1X"**



Bruce & Lynette Durheim, Ellendale, N.D. Four-Time GridMaster Award Winners.

Q: What do you expect from purchased Red Angus bulls?

A: **"Don't screw up our cowherd."**

Q: How much economic relevance do you place on milk?

A: **"We place very little selection pressure on milk, and actually shy away from high milk EPD bulls."**

CJ & Becky Blew, Pretty Prairie, Kan. Youngest producer to ever receive GridMaster Award

Q: What frame size bull works for in your operation?

A: **"5.5 or less"**

Q: How important is fleshing ability?

A: **"Using dormant grasses & crop residues we really appreciate the importance of ME EPDs"**



Donnell and Kelli Brown were the final speakers in the "Passing the Reins" segment. They led an interactive discussion to discover why each Young Guns attendee was there, what their tie to Red Angus was, and what was the best advice they ever received.

The final exercise of Young Guns 2 was the assimilation of all information gained and the results of the previous day's S.W.O.T. analysis into recommended priorities to be considered in the Red Angus Strategic Plan.

The concept behind Young Guns was molded in the December 2005 Strategic Planning Meeting, as a priority for Core Strategy 5 - Learning and Leadership Development.

In a survey of 2007 Young Guns participants, the overwhelming majority thought the event should be maintained annually, and attendance should be expanded. Five out of seven returning Young Guns said they preferred the more interactive program offered in the 2007 edition of Red Angus Young Guns. ■