

Young Guns 2008

by Clint Berry, RAAA Communications/Member Services Director

The 2008 Red Angus Young Guns Conference was held in Irving, Texas on July 17th - 19th at the Radisson DFW South Hotel. This year's event, the third annual, drew over 30 participants from across the country with both veteran and rookie attendees. Red Angus breeders from Montana to North Carolina and North Dakota to Texas were represented. First, second and third generation cattlemen joined in the discussions and took part in the interactive programs.



The Young Guns Conference is designed as an educational program geared towards both new and "young-to-the-breed" members. The goal is to encourage involvement, provide an avenue for progressive breeders to network, spur discussion on current topics affecting the breed and provide input into Red Angus' direction in the fluctuating beef industry. This program grew from the Young Breeders meeting, which started in 2004 and was held in Denver during the National Western Stock Show.

Thursday July 17th

The program kicked off at the La Hacienda Ranch Restaurant. The attendees enjoyed a great meal and fellowship as they visited with each other, RAAA staff members, and some of the speakers/sponsors of the program. After dinner, the group engaged in a strategic planning exercise based on the answers compiled from the questionnaire they completed prior to their arrival. The various responses provided the group with discussion topics that sparked multiple points of view and opinions.

Friday July 18th

The day started early with a welcome and opening comments from Greg Comstock, RAAA Executive Secretary and co-founder of the

Young Guns program. Following Comstock was a presentation on multi-breed EPDs with RAAA's own Larry Keenan. Special guest lecturers were staff members from the American Simmental Association (ASA). ASA has been involved in multi-breed EPD calculations for over a decade and are credited as being the most experienced in the beef industry. Dr. Jerry Lipsey, ASA Executive Secretary and Marty Ropp, Director of Field Services were on hand to discuss the benefits and challenges of multi-breed EPDs, while Wade Shaffer, ASA Geneticist, joined in via a conference call from Bozeman, Mont.

The first of the interactive team activities, EPD Poker, followed the ASA presentation. The participants were challenged with individually selecting EPDs of a bull from a given range that would fit into a specific commercial scenario. Then as a group, choosing which "bull" or suite of EPDs from their group would be most profitable in that scenario.

After lunch, Dr. Jim Gibb from Igenity discussed DNA markers and their relevance in the beef industry. He mentioned the ever increasing correlation between DNA markers and performance data being collected on individual feed efficiency. Following Gibb's presentation, the Young Guns participated in their second interactive contest called DNA Jeopardy, which took the



Young Guns 2008

theme of the popular television show with topics centering on DNA. The teams competed in a game show format complete with hand held buzzers and electronic displays projected on a large screen in the meeting room.

The final stop on the first day of the Young Gun's Conference featured a first for the program. A hands on exercise in feet and udder scoring on live cattle. The group boarded a charter bus and rode to 3K Land & Cattle in Justin, Texas. Once there, Sandra Utter of ABS Global gave a presentation on the importance of good feet and udder structure in cattle. Utter explained a scoring system that the attendees then utilized to evaluate groups of live cattle. They performed the tasks as individuals, then grouped together to turn in a final team score card. The exercise was well received and will give insight and experience into the development of an educational guide to assist breeders in evaluating cattle when making their genetic selections. Afterwards, the group was treated to a Texas style bar-b-que.

Saturday July 19th

The final day began as Dr. Kim McCuiston, from the King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management (KRIRM), discussed the strategies that are fundamental to profitable and sustainable ranching. She explained the process taught at KRIRM using the Balanced Scorecard approach and understanding and identifying Key Success Indicators. Through the implementation of this strategy, KRIRM has helped hundreds of ranchers realize the necessary steps needed to become or remain a profitable ranching operation.

Kelli Brown, of the RA Brown Ranch in Throckmorton, Texas, led the group in a strategic planning exercise. Brown explained the process and how RAAA has utilized and

benefitted from strategic planning. She encouraged the group to open their minds and interact with one another to help plot the course for the future of Red Angus. The group performed a S.W.O.T. analysis to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to Red Angus and help to plan the actions needed to accomplish the goals of the Association. The use of strategic planning allows a person to step back and take a look at the big picture vs. becoming bogged down on the small details; this provides an overall view and identifies how a person or business fits into that picture.

Next up on the program was a crowd favorite. Blake Angell of Meyer Natural Angus (MNA) discussed marketing and selection strategies that producers can implement to help make their ranching operations successful. He explained that you must know where you want to go before you can develop a plan that takes your operation there. Working backwards from the desired end point, allows cattlemen to select the genetics and programs needed to reach the goals they've set. Angell also presented the RAAA with a sponsorship check in the amount of \$2,079, representing the number of FCCP tagged cattle that were harvested by MNA in 2007.

The final group contest provided the attendees the chance to utilize the points or "Red Angus bucks" they had earned throughout the program. Each group was presented with a different scenario in different environments. The group was charged with planning their ranch's marketing strategy and then selecting genetics to move their operation toward the desired goal. The Red Angus bucks earned by each of the groups were utilized in a live bull sale with the assistance of C. Jason Spence of Spence and Co. Spence auctioned off bulls from a catalog developed with various EPD's. The groups were graded on their ability



to purchase bulls that fit their selected EPD criteria and within their budget. Additionally, some scenarios required the groups to purchase multiple bulls to fulfill their ranches needs.

The program wrapped up with closing comments by Comstock, who challenged the group to continue their commitment and involvement in Red Angus and in helping guide the direction of the breed. The overall interaction and opportunity of a hands-on exercise with live cattle were well received by the group. Attendees have already begun requesting spots for next year's Young Guns Conference. ■

Special thanks to all of the Young Guns sponsors including, Meyer Natural Angus, ABS Global, Identity and Drovers, without their continued support, this program would not be possible. I would also like to thank the American Simmental Association, Dr. McCuiston and the KRIRM team, and C. Jason Spence for their involvement and guidance in the program's content. Their expertise is invaluable and greatly appreciated. Last, but certainly not least, thanks to Judy Kay Ferguson, Kiley and Brenna DeVoe and the entire 3K family for allowing us to bring the Young Guns group out to the ranch. We are all deeply thankful for your hospitality, not to mention allowing us the use of your cowherd for teaching purposes.