



Fall 2010 Red Angus EPDs... The Next Genetic Paradigm

by Larry Keenan, RAAA Director of Breed Improvement

It is with great excitement that RAAA announces the availability of Red Angus' Fall 2010 EPDs. This is no ordinary EPD release, but rather the birth of Red Angus multi-breed genetic evaluation for growth and carcass traits.

Achieved through our working relationship with the American Simmental Association (ASA), the collective database is not only substantially larger with over 9 million animals included, but unsurpassed in its predictive power, because Total Herd Reporting remains the foundation of data collection. The result – unrivaled genetic selection tools which have the capability to advance Red Angus Stakeholders' competitive position within the beef industry.

A little about the dataset

Similar to RAAA's category system, the ASA has been registering cattle of various breed composition for over a decade. The dominating majority of those non-purebred Simmental animals are Sim-Angus, which are composed of Simmental x Red or Black Angus. ASA's Sim-Angus population has seen remark-

able growth, accounting for approximately 40% of annual registrations. ASA's Angus-rich dataset provides a significant contribution of performance data that is relevant to Red Angus. The net result being accelerated accuracies for our genetic description of Red Angus and Red Angus influenced cattle.

Another similarity between RAAA and ASA is our credence to Total Herd Reporting data. While ASA does not mandate their entire membership's participation in THE (Total Herd Enrollment, ASA's counterpart to RAAA's THR), only "Whole Herd" data is included in EPD calculations. Approximately 90% of eligible ASA cows are enrolled in THE. Combined, ASA and RAAA total nearly 200,000 cows contributing complete contemporary group data.

What hasn't changed

Multi-breed EPD calculations have the resources to account for heterosis and breed differences in cross-bred animals, and with an open herdbook, this means the animals in our RAAA database will be more accurately described. However, multi-breed EPDs do not compare performance of animals raised in

different producers' herds. Just as in all previous RAAA's EPD calculations, the weights and measurements of animals raised on your ranch will only be compared to animals within their respective contemporary group(s).

Although the EPDs were calculated on a multi-breed model that included ASA's database, the Red Angus EPDs are presented on a Red Angus base. Similarly, animals registered with ASA are described with EPDs set on the Simmental base. Therefore, you cannot directly compare EPDs published by RAAA and ASA. While the benefits of transitioning to a base that would allow for the direct comparison of all animals in the RAAA/ASA database were recognized, it was decided that a change in the Red Angus base was premature as ASA leadership has not discussed the future of their base. RAAA's Breed Improvement Committee has recommended that RAAA and ASA leadership enter into joint discussions to determine a long-term solution that would allow for the direct genetic comparison of all animals registered with RAAA and ASA. ■

Beef Industry Perspective

Troy Marshall, beef industry spokesman and breeder of Black Angus cattle, presented his thoughts regarding the RAAA/ASA combined genetic evaluation on the Beef Cow/Calf Weekly website: "Being in the forefront of performance testing and genetic evaluations, the Red Angus and Simmental breeds have always been considered more performance-and science-oriented than most breeds. So it's probably not surprising that the two breed organizations are in the forefront once again by creating a joint genetic evaluation that not only strengthens the evaluation of both breeds but helps commercial users better utilize the genetics. From a scientific and economic standpoint, this type of collaboration and cooperation has always been advocated. What's truly newsworthy about the joint genetic evaluation, however, is that these two organizations set aside the breed politics and competitiveness to get it done."