The History of Red Angus

Seven innovative families chose to use Red Angus in 1954 to establish the industry's first performance registry. Throughout its history, the Red Angus Association of America has maintained this objective focus and has earned a well deserved reputation for leadership and innovation. By making the right choices over time, and ignoring the short term pressures of industry fads, demand for Red Angus genetics by the beef industry is at an all time high.

"Red Angus are of exactly the same origin as (black) Angus cattle."

- Dr. Herman Purdy, "Breeds of Cattle"

THE ORIGIN OF "ANGUS"

Little is known of the exact early origin of the cattle that would become the Aberdeen Angus breed. Although some historians feel that polled cattle existed in Scotland before recorded history, most authorities feel that the early ancestors for the breed resulted from the interbreeding of small, dun-colored hornless cattle introduced in the eighth-century by raiding Norseman with the indigenous horned cattle of Northeastern Scotland. Although the cattle tended to be black, in his book, Modern Breeds of Livestock, H.M. Briggs states "the cattle found in Northern Scotland were not of uniform color, and many of the cattle of the early day had varied color markings or broken color patterns. Many of the cattle were polled but some few had horns."

Englishmen Robert Bakewell is rightly known as the "Father of Animal Breeding" for his work starting in 1760 breeding English Longhorn cattle as well as sheep and horses. By setting a definite ideal and then breeding the best to the best regardless of relationship, he proved desirable characteristics could be fixed and true breeding strains could be established. The implementation of these principles resulted in the formation of modern breeds as we know them. In 1784, breeders of Shorthorn cattle became the first to implement Bakewell's methods; while in Scotland, Hugh Watson in 1808 and William McCombie in 1829 are credited with the earliest use of Bakewell's principles in the breeding of Aberdeen Angus.

Eric L.C. Pentecost, a noted English breeder of Red Angus cattle, hypothesized that one source of red color was introduced into Aberdeen Angus cattle in the eighteenth century when the larger English Longhorns, predominantly red in color, were crossed with the smaller native polled cattle in order to provide for animals sufficiently large to be used for draft purposes.

Shortly after the turn of the nineteenth century many Scottish breeders looked very favorably on the use of the improved Shorthorn breed as a method to upgrade native stock. This crossing was so widely practiced that unimproved Aberdeen Angus cattle of the region were threatened with extinction. Since the first Angus Herdbook was not published until 1862, it can be presumed that the introduction of improved Shorthorn blood in the early part of the nineteenth century had a positive impact on what was to become the modern Aberdeen Angus breed.

ANGUS - RED OR BLACK?

Hugh Watson of Keillor, Scotland is universally recognized as the father of the modern Aberdeen Angus breed. When he started his farming activities in 1808, he received six of the "best and blackest cows, as well as a bull" from his father's herd. That same summer, he also visited the leading Scottish cattle markets acquiring ten heifers and a bull that showed the Angus characteristics he was striving to breed. According to Briggs, "the (purchased) females were of various colors, but the bull was black; Watson decided the color of his herd should be black and he started to select in that direction." Although black became the most desired color for the breed, because red is a recessive gene, it would remain in the genepool.

EARLY ANGUS HERDBOOKS

The first Aberdeen Angus herdbook, published in 1862 in Scotland, entered both reds and blacks without distinction. The practice of registering red and black cattle in the same herdbook is still practiced today in Britain and every other major beef producing country in the world, except the United States.

Aberdeen Angus were introduced into America in the 1870s and soon attained high popularity. The first American herdbooks, published in 1886 and 1888 respectively, made no record as to the color of individual animals. In 1890, twenty-two reds were registered in the American Aberdeen Angus Herdbook of some 2,700 individuals entered that year. In 1917, the American Aberdeen Angus Association barred the registration of the reds and other colors altogether. This severe discrimination against the red color in an effort to assure a pure black strain brought a marked decline in the number of red calves born in American herds.

That the red cattle were an untapped genetic resource was summed up well by Leon J. Cole and Sara V. H. Jones of the University of Wisconsin Agricultural Experiment Station in their 1920 publication on "The Occurrence of Red Calves in Black Breeds of Cattle:"

"One more point should be emphasized, namely that the red individuals appearing in such stock (Aberdeen Angus)...are just as truly 'purebred' as their black relatives, and there is no reason why, in all respects save color, they should not be fully as valuable. The fact that they are discarded while the blacks are retained is simply due to the turn of fortune that black rather than red became established fashion for the Aberdeen Angus breed. Had red been the chosen color, there would never have been any trouble with the appearance of blacks as off-color individuals, since red-to-red breeds true."

IT WAS PERFORMANCE FROM THE BEGINNING

In 1945, various cattlemen throughout the United States started selecting and breeding reds cropped from the best black Aberdeen Angus herds in America. In 1954, seven visionary breeders gathered to establish a unique breeder's organization known as the Red Angus Association of America (RAAA). Rejecting the norms of the times, the RAAA was designed around the new scientific principles of performance testing. Founding member George Chiga

explained, "The establishment of Red Angus (Association) was more than an accumulation of numbers. It was dreaming of a new approach." In August of 1954, the Association's first president, Waldo Forbes, Sr., summed-up the vision of the founding members:

"The policy of the (Red Angus) Association is to discourage the more artificial practices in purebred cattle production and to place its faith instead in objective tests, consisting for the most part of comparisons within herds of factors of known economic importance and known heritability... By making this an integral part of the registration system, Red Angus breeders feel that even faster progress can be made toward the ultimate goal of more efficient beef production."

According to RAAA's first executive secretary, Sally Forbes, "Waldo was above all interested in developing a breed performance program rather than building a new breed for its own sake and the charter members of the Association were...much of the same mind." So, from the beginning, performance data was required for registration of all cattle. The ultimate goal was to initiate a system to objectively evaluate and select cattle based on traits of economic importance, and to build an Association that would adopt and embrace scientific innovation.

The RED ANGUS ASSOCIATION of AMERICA (RAAA) has long been noted for its far-sighted vision of beef production. Over a variety of fronts Red Angus has either led the industry, or been an early adopter of new technologies. This maverick attitude allowed the RAAA to adopt philosophies and technologies that were deemed too risky or unconventional by other associations. Here is a sample of some visionary policies enacted by the RAAA:

It Was Always About Performance

In 1954, when the Association took this bold move to build a Performance Registry, the scientific community had not even settled on using 205 days to serve as the age to which weaning weights would be adjusted. While reporting weaning data has become second nature for Red Angus breeders, very few breed associations mandate performance data as a requirement for registration... even today, when the value of performance based selection has been so clearly demonstrated.

Open A.I.

Artificial Insemination has proven to be one of the most powerful tools in the beef industry's genetic progress. However, prior to the 1970's, most breed associations enforced strict regulations making the technology impractical for many breeders. However, the RAAA in 1954 set its own course in which A.I. was open and unrestricted within the Red Angus breed.

Objective Evaluation

Red Angus was the first to incorporate performance data in the showring, holding the first "performance" show in 1956. It was not until the 1990's that some breeds started to use objective data in the showring as an additional evaluation tool for the judge, besides the traditional visual appraisal of animals. Although Red Angus is not known as a "show breed", the Association does sponsor a National Show each year with the judge being provided objective data for traits of economic relevance to the industry.

The Common Denominator

RAAA's founders saw crossbreeding as an opportunity to expand commercial utilization of the breed, and as early as 1961, began promoting the use of Red Angus in planned crossbreeding systems. This was approximately ten years before the industry even started to accept crossbreeding as a tool for commercial cow/calf production. In 1970, Red Angus continued its industry leadership by starting and promoting an F-1 program. The influx of Continental breeds in the late 1960's and 70's offered another foothold for breed growth due to the complementary traits Red Angus offered these European imports. 1999 marked another first as the RAAA worked with other breed associations to promote the benefits of heterosis and breed complementarity.

Open Registry

In 1980, the RAAA broke ranks from the other British breeds by instituting a category registration system. This far sighted program still kept the 100%, Category 1-A cattle separated, but it additionally allowed breeders to develop Category 1-B cattle through a process of breeding-up. Implementation of Category II exhibits RAAA's "color-blind" approach to beef production and allowed Red Angus breeders to utilize the Black Angus animals to expand the gene pool by creating outcross genetics. Through Category III, pedigree and performance data is maintained on foundation animals, hybrids, and composites.

HOW THE RED COLOR WORKS

Black red carrier Angus cows produce red calves.

B = dominant black gene
b = recessive red gene
bb = homozygous red
BB = homozygous black
Bb = heterozygous black, red carrier

bb Red

BB Black

Bb Black Red Carrier

	b	b
b	bb	bb
b	bb	bb

Red x Red
100% progeny will be red (even if any red parent had a black parent)

	b	b
B	Bb	Bb
b	bb	bb

Black Red Carrier x Red
50% progeny will be red and 50% will be black. Reds will be pure red and blacks will all be red carriers.

	b	b
B	Bb	Bb
B	Bb	Bb

Black (non red carrier) x Red
100% progeny will be black (red carriers).

	B	b
B	BB	Bb
b	Bb	bb

Black Red Carrier x Black Red Carrier
75% progeny will be black and 25% will be red. Of the blacks, two-thirds (or 50% of total progeny) will be red carriers, and one-third (or 25% of total progeny) will be non red carriers.

Serving the Beef Industry

From its inception, the RAAA identified the breed's primary customer as the commercial beef industry. In keeping with this focus, RAAA developed Red Angus Marketing Programs, which offers a wide range of services designed to add value to customers' investment in superior Red Angus genetics. When commercial producers receive the transfer on a registered Red Angus bull, a complimentary one year subscription to American Red Angus Magazine is provided.

Total Herd Reporting

In 1995, RAAA again broke ranks with the status quo with the implementation of an inventory based performance reporting system and fee structure. Total Herd Reporting (THR) requires the production of every registered Red Angus female to be reported annually, as well as the performance of every Red Angus calf raised through weaning, as a requirement for registration. If a cow and her calf are not accounted for in a given year, the cow is inactivated in the database.

Profit starts at Reproduction

The RAAA has led the industry with its commitment to objectively describe traits related to reproduction. Released in 1995, the first of this new class of EPDs was Red Angus' Stayability estimate. Based on data that can only be gathered with a THR system, in 2001 Red Angus published the industry's first comprehensive reproductive sire summary. Included in the summary were genetic predictions for Calving Ease Direct, Heifer Pregnancy, Maternal Calving Ease, and Stayability.

Red Angus is Real Angus

In 1995, Red Angus unveiled the industry's first genotypic and source verification program, the Feeder Calf Certification Program (FCCP). The innovative FCCP has the honor of being the first USDA Process Verified Program (PVP). Today, calves wearing the Red Angus FCCP tag, come with the three USDA process verified claims of: Traceability to minimum 50% Red Angus bloodlines, Source Verification to Ranch of Origin, and Group Age Verification.

Value Based Marketing

RAAA is believed to be the first breed association to offer its members and commercial customers a value-based pricing grid with a major packing company.

Built on Economic Relevance

As many beef breed associations entered a race in the 1990's to see how many EPDs they could produce, Red Angus took a different path. RAAA's goal was to comprehensively describe reproduction, growth and carcass traits with the fewest EPDs possible. To achieve this goal, the concept of Economically Relevant Traits (ERT) was pioneered in which only EPDs directly related to a revenue or expense would be developed. In 2004, Red Angus became the first breed to provide a genetic selection tool for the expense side of ranchers' profit equation. The Mature Cow Maintenance Energy Requirement EPD (ME) predicts the energy required for a bull's daughters to maintain their body condition.

Leadership Has Made A Difference

Red Angus are Angus; yet the Red Angus breeders' history of leadership and innovation have made a profound difference in the red strain. Red Angus breeders have maintained a commercial focus allowing them to avoid the short-term fads that have negatively affected so many other breeds. The Red Angus gene pool offers a consistent source of traditional Angus traits, including carcass quality, maternal characteristics, calving ease, and moderate size. In addition, Red Angus offer uniformity, good disposition, and outstanding feeding characteristics. All of these are backed by the industry's most precise, reliable and comprehensive genetic predictions; and service after the sale that includes a comprehensive commercial marketing program.

Summary

Times have certainly changed. The "reds" have gone from being undesirable and discarded for much of the twentieth century, only because of their color, to being a preeminent source of Angus genetics. Red Angus' fifty plus year commitment to its founding members' vision of more efficient beef production through the use of the scientific principles of performance testing has been realized.

Due to the numerous natural advantages with which the Red Angus breed is endowed, and based on the continued philosophy of the Red Angus Association of America, it appears that a great breed has come into its own. The future of the breed as the common denominator in progressive cattle producers' crossbreeding systems is unlimited.

RED HIDE COLOR HAS THREE DISTINCT ADVANTAGES:

1) Red is the most populous color of cattle breeds world wide. Red Angus provides a continuity and uniformity of color to any crossbreeding system.

2) Red is more heat tolerant than black and the bronze pigmentation gives great resistance to cancer eye and sun burned udders. The majority of the world's cattle are in areas that need heat tolerance, so the red color is a definite advantage.

3) Being crossed red always breeds true. Red Angus carry no diluter genes and thus avoid the grays that result when crossbreeding with blacks.

Building Better Beef...

Red Angus

Red Angus Association of America
4201 N. Interstate 35 • Denton, TX 76207
(940) 387-3502 • RedAngus.org