

Keep Better Track of Cows

MaternalPlus® can help improve herd and breed.

by Barb Baylor Anderson, field editor

With 800 cows scattered across a 70-mile area, keeping track of each of them can be a challenge. Angus seedstock producer Richard Tokach from Saint Anthony, N.D., says MaternalPlus® is helping him address that issue on their ranch. The computer-based inventory reporting system also is building an industry database that can expand reproductive and lifetime productivity tools.

“Our cows only come home once a year. A big challenge is tracking the cows that may die from lightning strikes, or in the creek, or knowing which ones we culled and why,” says Tokach, who works with his brother, Brad, and son, Ben. Ben is in charge of tagging and weighing calves and animal disposals.

“Ben uses his smartphone to keep track of the data now, and then I can transfer it to the computer. It’s better than scribbling it on a piece of paper that ends up lost.”

The Tokach family has been using MaternalPlus since its inception.

“We are in our third year. We jumped on board at the beginning. Any time you can collect data on traits and make progress that helps Angus producers be leaders in the seedstock industry, it’s good news,” he says.

Tokach family members are no strangers to maintaining herd records. Richard says his dad, also named Richard, used the Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR®) program to track cows. AHIR today includes weights and measures, as well as carcass and ultrasound data.

Steve Olson, Olson Land & Cattle, Hereford, Texas, also has relied on AHIR recordkeeping.

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— Ginger Olson

really replaced that with MaternalPlus,” he says.

Olson’s wife, Ginger, does the data entry. “I like that when we dispose of a cow, the system asks for a reason. Instead of forgetting when or how a cow died or was culled, we can plug the information into MaternalPlus right away. This is a much better recordkeeping system for us.”

“Some people struggle with the MaternalPlus disposal codes, but you need to be accurate,” says Tokach. “You have to keep track of why you cull cows — for bad udders or disposition or other reasons — and then you can be more accurate in making your culling decisions.”

MaternalPlus is designed to provide Angus breeders with information that will help them make effective selection decisions, adds Tonya Amen, American Angus Association genetic service director. Cow disposal codes



MaternalPlus® mechanics

- ▶ Angus breeders can enroll in MaternalPlus at any time.
- ▶ AAA Login (www.angusonline.org) is the venue for participating and learning more about MaternalPlus.
- ▶ Calving ease, birth weight and weaning weight expected progeny differences (EPDs) are provided.
- ▶ Breeders can report data using traditional means of performance reporting, such as Angus Information Management Software (AIMS), AAA Login or other software.
- ▶ MaternalPlus allows for complete production and disposal analysis of your cow herd.
- ▶ Requirements include heifer breeding records and, for each female, a calf record (weight, preweaning or disposal code) or disposal code for the cow; or reason designations.
- ▶ There are no additional charges for turning in weaning weights. The \$3-per-cow charge on MaternalPlus covers the weaning weight charge for calves.

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and reason designations will allow for the future development of more informative selection tools for things such as lifetime productivity.

Retain or cull females

Olson also uses MaternalPlus as an evaluation tool. The family has a 100-head, spring-calving herd and a commercial beef herd. The Olsons always culled their lower-end registered heifers by sending them at weaning into the commercial herd. They retain the most promising females to upgrade their registered herd.

“With AHIR, we can’t get EPDs until the animals are registered. With MaternalPlus, we can get the EPDs without registering them after we turn in birth and weaning weights. We can make better, informed culling decisions before we have the expense of registering those cattle,” says Olson. “The whole-herd-reporting approach keeps me from missing anything.”

MaternalPlus allows breeders to capture additional reproductive-trait data, confirms Amen. Producers receive information at weaning processing time, including calving

ease, birth weight and weaning weight EPDs for calves out of their inventoried cows.

“We can better analyze for fertility and make faster progress in improving our cow herd,” adds Tokach. “We can see where our program needs to improve. By turning in our data, I think we can also anticipate greater accuracy in current heifer pregnancy EPDs.”

Benefits outweigh time investment

Tokach says it was fairly easy to get started with MaternalPlus. He signs in with his AHIR information, and follows pretty straightforward parameters.

“One thing I did not realize the first time I signed in was that there were a rather large number of already disposed cows in our active herd inventory list. I had to go through the inventory and remove those cows that were no longer part of the herd,” he says. “It takes time, but you just sit down and do it.”

Generally speaking, Tokach says, he doesn’t mind the time investment.

“It is another layer of collected data. The more layers we have, the more complicated it becomes, but it will give us superior selection tools for fertility measures,” he says. “I would

like to see an EPD for cow longevity or stayability. You have to start somewhere, and this data is a meaningful start.”

“The longevity of a cow is important, and the longer she is in the herd, the better,” adds Olson. “If you maintain a base herd with contemporary groups especially, MaternalPlus is a great way to go. If you rely primarily on embryo transfer, you may not see the same benefits.”

Tokach is optimistic the use of MaternalPlus will expand in the future and be useful to more Angus breeders.

“Just as carcass EPDs have become standard now, this is important data for the future,” he says. “The process to collect enough data is slow, but it will be worth it in the long run. We used to just look at cow families for clues on which females to choose. MaternalPlus and future EPDs will be valuable to spread across the Angus industry, once ready.”

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Editor’s Note: A former National Junior Angus Board member, Barb Baylor Anderson is a freelancer from Edwardsville, Ill.

The Angus Report Doubles Airings Each Week

Viewers now have more opportunities to watch the popular news program.

by **Crystal Albers**, communications director

If you enjoy Angus TV programming, there’s good news coming: Beginning Nov. 1, the American Angus Association’s popular news program, *The Angus Report*, will increase its airings from two to four times per week on RFD-TV.

Since its launch three years ago, the program has been broadcast on Monday mornings at 7:30 a.m. and Saturday afternoons at 1:30 p.m., in the Central time zone. Now, the program will air additionally on Wednesday evenings at 5 p.m. CDT and Thursday afternoons at 3:30 p.m. CDT.

“Having the program air four times a week instead of two dramatically increases our ability to communicate timely news and information about the Angus business to cattle producers across the country,” says Eric Grant, president and general manager of Angus Productions Inc. (API). “It’s also good news for Angus breeders and allied industry who advertise on our program. The broader exposure expands the frequency of their advertising — and gives them more exposure among a growing audience.”

The decision will also make it easier for viewers in all time zones to tune in and watch the program.

“Viewers from the East coast to the West coast will have more opportunities to tune in and enjoy the program at a time that’s convenient for their own work and personal schedules,” Grant says.

The Angus Report began airing on RFD-TV in 2011. Since that time the program’s viewership has nearly tripled, according to Nielsen, ranking it now among RFD-TV’s most-watched agribusiness programs. The program enjoys a robust online audience, with all segments posted to www.angus.org and other popular websites each week.

RFD-TV also announced that it had reached a distribution agreement with AT&T U-Verse, which increases the network’s reach to 47-plus million households nationwide.

“We’re really grateful to RFD-TV for their commitment to expanding farm- and ranch-focused TV programming to more viewers across the country,” Grant says. “RFD-TV founder Patrick Gottsch and his

team have reshaped the way organizations like ours and many others reach our audience and communicate information that makes producers more competitive and economically sustainable.”

In addition to *The Angus Report*, the American Angus Association and API also produce a weekly 30-minute radio show, *Angus Talk*, that airs every Saturday morning at 10 a.m. CDT on Rural Radio Channel 80 on Sirius XM Radio; and an ongoing documentary series, *I Am Angus*, which is slated to air Thanksgiving evening, Christmas night and on the evening of Jan. 5, 2015, on RFD-TV.

RFD-TV is distributed by more than 625 cable operations, and can be found on DirecTV channel 345 and Dish Network channel 231. Check local listings for more information.

To learn more or to watch segments from past shows, visit www.angus.org.

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