

NALF Announces Genetic Evaluation Service Provider

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Historically, one of three universities—Colorado State University (CSU), Cornell University (CU) or the University of Georgia (UGA)—has conducted the genetic evaluations that provide expected progeny differences (EPDs) for the U.S. beef breed associations. The beef cattle breeding and genetics groups at those universities are the principle parties comprising the coordinated efforts of the National Beef Cattle Evaluation Consortium (NBCEC).

In recent times—due to financial, staffing and time constraints—NBCEC has indicated its intentions to shift away from routine genetic evaluations and focus its resources on genetic research, development of next-generation genetic evaluation software, and producer application and outreach. It is important to note NBCEC will license, support and provide enhancements to its genetic evaluation software for breed associations or entities that want to provide evaluation services; it just will not be conducting the actual evaluations.

NBCEC justifiably maintains that keeping the U.S. genetic evaluation system the best in the world requires a change in infrastructure such that the industry provides the service and universities concentrate resources on research and development.

That means U.S. beef breed associations must find new homes in the private sector for their genetic evaluations, preferably before 2010. While domestic and international options exist for genetic evaluation, economically viable ones for small- and medium-sized breed associations are limited due to the costs associated with software, hardware and highly-skilled personnel.

Given the critical importance of genetic evaluation, that situation prompted the North American Limousin Foundation (NALF) Board of Directors and staff to begin a serious evaluation of options in 2006. After 18 months of careful study and two separate prototype EPD runs, NALF selected Angus Genetics Inc. (AGI) to provide its genetic evaluation services beginning in the summer of 2008.

“AGI was created to perform genetic evaluation services and conduct research to benefit the beef industry,” said Bill Bowman, the company’s president. “We are excited to work with NALF to provide genetic selection tools for its customers.”

AGI will produce NALF’s EPDs for birth weight (BW), weaning weight (WW), yearling weight (YW), milking ability (MA) and scrotal circumference (SC) using the same software UGA has been using to evaluate Limousin animals. The routine analysis will include genetic evaluation data from both NALF and the American Angus Association (AAA). UGA and NBCEC will provide future enhancements to the evaluation methodology and software licensed to AGI.

CSU will continue to produce NALF’s EPDs for calving-ease (CE), stayability (STAY), docility (DOC) and carcass traits.

Based on prototype Limousin EPDs from AGI, combining pedigree and performance data from both breeds will not affect the rankings of fullblood, purebred and higher percentage animals. A distinct advantage of combining those data sources is that EPDs for Lim-Flex® animals will be the most reliable

and accurate they can be because of the millions of pedigree and performance records included in the analysis.

The overall “look” of NALF’s EPDs for those traits will remain the same (similar mean and percentile rankings associated with different levels of EPDs for each trait) such that selection benchmarks will have continuity for Limousin breeders and commercial users of Limousin genetics.

“NALF is excited to begin this new chapter in genetic evaluation and our ongoing quest to propagate the most profitable Limousin and Lim-Flex genetics possible for commercial producers,” said NALF President Bob Millerberg of Draper, Utah, who has chaired the organization’s Operations and Performance Programs Committee since 2006.

“We are privileged to work with a solid, knowledgeable and innovative company such as AGI,” he added, “and we look forward to many years of having it help us deliver industry-leading genetic information to our members and customers.” **LW**

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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