



Association COMMENTARY

by R.L. "Bob" Hough, Ph.D.
Executive Vice President
North American Limousin Foundation

Genetic Evaluation

The spring 2010 International Limousin Genetic Evaluation brings good news to users of Limousin genetics. Genetic trends show the Limousin breed is responding to commercial demand by decreasing birth weight while increasing both weaning and yearling growth. The latest analysis saw carcass traits improve, including both marbling and ribeye area, which are antagonistic traits. Also, docility improved significantly breedwide, and all the reproductive genetic trends improved, including calving-ease direct, calving-ease maternal, scrotal circumference and stayability. Good job, breeders!

Those genetic trends show Limousin breeders are dedicated to improving the breed and are using the most up-to-date tools to do so. The breed is building on its strengths of feed efficiency, muscling, growth and calving-ease while shoring up areas of improvement in a way that positions the breed to be seriously considered in any crossbreeding program. That is the goal: to be the common denominator in progressive commercial producers' crossbreeding systems. I am proud of Limousin breeders' results in constructing a product, as is represented in those genetic trends, which adds Limousin's unique strengths without burdening customers' crossbreeding systems with any disproportional weaknesses, such as excess birth weight.

With the new genetic evaluation available, remember that expected progeny differences (EPDs) represent the best objective tool a breeder has for describing an animal genetically. When marketing bulls, be sure the information is available and try to steer the genetic profile of your customers' future herd sires to meet their needs in terms of cowherd genetics, environment and method of marketing. Use the percentile tables to see how your cattle stack up against the breed. Then, if a customer wants a high-marbling bull, for example, you will stand on solid ground in knowing where your cattle's EPDs are within the Limousin population. Also, remember to continue to collect data. Ultrasound and yearling data will make your cattle's yearling and carcass EPDs more accurate and precise.

Strategic Planning

The Board of Directors, staff, emerging leaders and membership all have been participating in a dynamic strategic planning process. This started with a December planning session with the Board, Kyle Haley with the *Limousin World* and key members of the NALF staff. It continued with the feedback session at the Annual Meeting at the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) and will include a meeting with emerging leaders in Kansas City. So far, discussions have been thoughtful, insightful and even lively at times. One thing is for sure: Everyone wants to see the Limousin breed succeed, and we have many good minds to mine from.

The strategic plan will include vision and mission statements. One sentiment that came out early on is our need to serve the commercial segment of our industry and to unite in our thrust rather than pigeonholing ourselves as fullblood, purebred or Lim-Flex® breeders. In the end, we are all servicing customers who are in the beef business—whether they are supplying commodity or specialty markets like Laura's Lean Beef and Strauss Free Raised® veal.

Another result of the plan will be core strategies and, accompanying each, action items. Included in the first draft were strategies like breed improvement, membership development, effective operations, commercial acceptance and financial stability. After everyone has had a chance to provide input, the Board will finalize the plan at its April meeting, and the work will begin.

This strategic plan will not be a one-shot deal but represents a new way of doing business for NALF. Each year at the April meeting, the Board will update the plan, make sure the priorities are still correct and make adjustments as needed. The staff will then generate a proposed budget based on those priorities and present it to the Board for consideration at the August meeting. That will help keep us on target and on budget. This type of continuity will help lead us to sustained performance in high-priority areas, which is something we must do if we are to build this breed by helping make our members economically viable.

LW