



## Association COMMENTARY

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

The beginning of the new year is one of the most exciting times for me. New expected progeny differences (EPDs) come out. With them, initial sire selection for next year's calf crop starts; preparations get underway for bull sales; and before you know it, calving starts.

Producing an outstanding International Limousin Genetic Evaluation is one of the key tenets of why the North American Limousin Foundation (NALF) exists. The breed has many firsts in genetic evaluation, including the first breedwide EPD run in 1985. It also led the industry with EPDs for scrotal circumference and docility, and it was one of the early adopters of the "full-animal model" for production of EPDs.

Remember, when designing a breeding program, EPDs are the best tools to use, assuming sires have met basic criteria for structure and such. EPDs are by far the most accurate estimation you have of an animal's genetic makeup, not adjusted measurements or ratios. I always have said: Keep and cull based on performance, and breed based on EPDs.

I am a big fan of balance when it comes to breeding programs. One of the first things I did at Red Angus was discontinue the trait-leader lists. Most of the bulls might have been outstanding for a certain trait (like yearling weight) but totally unacceptable in another (like birth weight). Bulls must offer a blend of traits that will produce cattle suitable to their environments. We must not lose our strengths—calving-ease combined with growth and muscling—as we move forward and keep a close eye on our weaknesses—too many Standard carcasses and docility. Luckily, we have genetic predictions for all of those traits.

With the new genetic analysis, make sure your bull customers know they can get updated EPD reports for their bull inventories free of charge by contacting Frank Padilla at the NALF office. In an effort to serve bull customers, we are sending updated bull-EPD reports to the top 500 bull buyers over the last three years. We also sent leather-bound business planners to the top 50 customers. It is far more cost-effective to take a little time to keep existing customers than it is to spend a lot of effort finding new customers. For bull customers to be on any of those lists, they must have had the bulls transferred to their names. Complete your bull sales professionally by transferring ownership.

As you prepare for this year's bull sales, be sure you get all of your data collected and reported to NALF in a timely manner. Ultrasound scanning is no longer an option when selling to progressive commercial cow-calf producers. They simply expect ultrasound data, and it is important to line up technicians early because they can be tough to schedule if you wait too long. You can find NALF's *Guide to Ultrasound* and a list of ultrasound technicians in the "Genetic Evaluation" section of the NALF Web site.

At NALF's founding, performance recording was mandatory and an integral part of developing a breed based on science. That gave way to fast registrations and easy money. I urge people who turn in performance data to go back to our founding members' vision and start total-herd reporting by joining the Limousin Inventory Management System (LIMS). Partial reporting results in poorer EPDs for your good animals and inflated EPDs for your bad ones. With biased growth EPDs, you get biased milk EPDs. Joining LIMS also allows NALF to build an accurate database for reproductive traits, including heifer pregnancy, stayability and maintenance energy. Studies have shown that reproductive traits are twice as economically important as growth traits and two to 10 times more economically important than carcass traits, depending on how you market your cattle.

For many of you, LIMS will be a different concept. You go from registering individual cattle to managing a cow inventory. At Red Angus, total-herd reporting is mandatory and has been in place since 1995. At that time, Red Angus was the 12th-largest breed. It now ranks fourth, and members easily deal with the concept of managing a cow herd. I am not proposing that LIMS become a mandatory program, but I think—if you analyze it on its merits and take it on with the simple logic that you now will be managing an entire cow inventory rather than individual animals—the program will enjoy the support of the majority of the membership. At the same time, NALF will move back to what Dick Goff and the founders initially envisioned. **LW**